With the Birds

OLIVER G. PIKE

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HILLSIDE, ROCK AND DALE

TAWNY OWL.

WITH THE BIRDS

On Hillside, Rock, and Dale

BY

OLIVER G. PIKE

AUTHOR OF "WOODLAND, FIELD, AND SHORE"; "IN BIRD-LAND WITH FIELD-GLASS AND CAMERA"
ETC. ETC.

Pied Wagtail

ILLUSTRATED WITH ONE HUNDRED AND TEN PHOTOGRAPHS TAKEN DIRECT FROM NATURE BY THE AUTHOR

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Preface

SOME additional results of wanderings in bird-land since the publication of *Woodland, Field, and Shore*, are given in this book. I have endeavoured to picture with pen and camera the homes and haunts of those birds which I have met with. Some of these are well known, and may be seen during an afternoon ramble in any of our country lanes and woods; others are rare, and their haunts are little known; some readers of this book may never have seen such, and therefore I hope that my accounts of their wild homes will be found acceptable.

I have to thank the following gentlemen for permission most kindly given to photograph birds and nests in their grounds: The Right Hon. Sir Charles W. Dilke, Bart., M.P., John W. Ford, Esq., J.P., Colonel Evan Thomas, Captain John Taylor, Captain Otto Gurlitt, and A. H. Paynter, Esq. I have also specially to thank Ernest Smith, Esq., and W. K. Robertson, Esq., for the opportunities afforded for photographing birds and nests in their grounds, which in the spring and summer are crowded with bird life. Mr. Percy

Hanson and Mr. J. A. Walpole Bond have rendered me valuable assistance while photographing nests, and I am also greatly indebted to all those who have informed me of localities where our rarer birds breed. I shall always be glad to hear of such places; and opportunities for photographing birds and nests in any part of the British Islands will always be appreciated. The Editor of the *Daily Express* kindly allows me to reproduce "Sparrow Town" and "The Heron at Home," which appeared in that journal.

O. G. P.

WINCHMORE HILL, MIDDLESEX
May, 1902

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Hillside, Rock and Dale

I

A Suburban Estate

DABCHICK

THE suburban estate referred to in this chapter forms part of that delightfully wild tract of Old England which is known as Enfield Chase. The greater part of this fine area is still some of the most picturesque country in Middlesex. On this Chase stood three large houses—South, East, and West Lodges. These residences were probably the homes of head-keepers, and being now surrounded as they are with woods, fields, and lakes, they form the finest harbours of bird life in the county. It is with only one of these estates that I wish now to deal, and for obvious reasons I do not name the one particularly

described. I can say, however, that if any bird-nesters or other destroyers of bird life are found within the well-protected grounds, they will receive a very unwelcome or inhospitable reception.

If birds are given a fair chance to breed on such an estate as the one in question, it is remarkable to find how great is the variety of species to be found. It would appear that if one species of birds are able to breed unmolested, others find out this reassuring fact, and in time the place becomes a naturalist's paradise. I found kestrels and owls among the many birds breeding here. The nest of the latter was in a shrubbery, and this was full of smaller bird life; while on the estate over which the kestrels roamed, birds were found in the greatest and most charming abundance. Why is it that some people *will* destroy all birds of prey? I can assure them from practical experience they will have more and stronger birds in their grounds if they allow the kestrel and owls to multiply in moderation. The weaker birds, which are less able to take care of themselves, will be thinned out and the stronger ones will remain. Natural selection, together with the survival of the fittest, will bring about an unlooked-for but welcome result in this case; so that sportsmen, if they want sport, should encourage a few birds of prey to breed in their grounds. By this I mean that, as a result, there will be strong, healthy birds; and all sportsmen

prefer to "grass" a partridge going down wind at any speed between fifty and eighty miles an hour, to one that feebly rises at their feet and flutters away at a pace not much quicker than their retrievers can run. The stronger birds are quite able to take care of themselves, and the presence of an enemy always makes them more cute or self-reliant, and consequently there is more satisfaction in knowing that your birds are the best that can be reared.

This suburban estate contains one large lake and several smaller pieces of water, all of which have plenty of bird life to add to their charms. The larger or lower lake is inclosed by a fringe of reeds and iris roots. In one part especially, the whole corner is overgrown with water-plants, and often as I pass I see the black head of a reed-bunting showing from a swaying stem; or perchance one hears the merry *chat-chat-chat* of a sedge-warbler, hidden as he is in the thick bushes near the taller reeds.

Wandering round the lake, and keeping a keen look-out for any movements, we can notice many of the lesser-known habits of water-birds which are here. In fact, if we lie on the bank and effectually hide ourselves we have the pleasure of seeing numbers of water-birds at home. If we want to see how any really wild bird behaves—that is, find out its own everyday habits—we must be hidden.

The two white swans "on guard" in the centre of the large lake raise their heads and swim slowly in our direction; the male raises his wings and hisses, evidently wondering what two such very early visitors can want there. At his note of anger a moor-hen flies from the reeds, dragging his hanging legs across the water, making little splashes, brightened with a touch of gold by the rising sun. Others follow; a coot swims out, and on his loud alarm—*beck*, a heron, which we just have time to see standing almost to his breast feathers in the water, raises his great wings and flies to a prominent dead branch on the small wooded island. He, too, cannot understand why he should thus be disturbed at his early morning meal. Now seeing us he once more opens his wings and is gone.

Swish, splash, *quack-ack, ack quack!* What a commotion! A wild duck, greatly alarmed, is almost trodden upon as we go through the reeds. Away he flies, *quacking* and beating the water with his wings; then up above the island trees, and round he goes, followed by others. Now they pass us, their wings whistling as they swiftly go by; a few more flights round, and the leader enters the water by sliding into it, and all follow his example. But this will not do; we are scaring the feathered inhabitants of this favoured piece of water. We hide behind a mound of earth therefore, and peering through the reeds

which are here conveniently thin, we wait and watch.

The pair of swans, which for some time look in our direction, at last settle down, and while one lays its long neck on its back and falls asleep, the other

COOT'S NEST

feeds in a half-hearted, lazy kind of way. Coots swim slowly out from shelter and look well around; one gives a contented-sounding note, and goes towards its nest among the bushes at the farther end of the lake. The coot is the sentinel of any lake or piece of water on which it is found. All water-birds seem to understand the language of coots. Let anyone watch for a time a stretch of water on which there are plenty of waterfowl, including coots. If one of the coots thinks there is cause for alarm, he calls *beck* (danger), and all the birds in sight will slink away to the shelter of reeds. But wait until the coot swims out and calls *peuf-peuf* (all right, all right), why, the ducks and moor-hens will show themselves, and even the shy dabchick will pop his head above water and commence to play on the unrippled surface. So it is on the occasion of our early morning visit; for the appearance of the coots is a signal to others that all is clear. A heron flying over, seeing the coots out and about, turns in his flight, circles round the island, and lands near the water; then for ten minutes he stands motionless with head erect, watching intently the fields and hedgerows round about; then he lowers his head and walks slowly towards the reeds. Stepping lightly through these he enters the water, putting his feet down so gently and slowly that no trace of a ripple is made, and there he stands, silent and

still for many minutes. His long neck is bent and his head is drawn down to his back, and he appears to be asleep. But slowly we see his long beak rising, his neck shows, and then his head is plunged under the water, and food of some kind is brought up. This is swallowed, and the bird moves slowly a few feet farther down by the side of the reeds; then carefully washing his beak by shaking it backwards and forwards in the water, he again settles down to watch and wait.

In a small bay near one end of the lake there swims a coot. This is the male, who is guarding his corner of the water, and no other coot is allowed to enter this apparently private property; yet many of these water-birds do—perhaps accidentally—swim towards the corner, sacred to the coot because his mate is sitting on her eight eggs underneath a bush just on the shore of the small bay. Directly he sees another coot approaching he swims towards it, and if the invader still approaches the reserved corner, he endeavours to the best of his ability to protect this space from trespass. Not for a moment does he turn his back to the enemy. Whichever way the approaching coot swims he is faced, and when they are near to one another, the coot on guard raises his wings over his back and brings them forward in the shape of an open fan; his head and neck are laid flat on the water, the beak only being raised a little,

and so he prepares to meet the trespasser. The other coot accepting this performance as a challenge, puts himself in a similar position, and swims towards the challenger. After manœuvring for a short time, always one beak pointing to the other beak, one drops his wings and angrily darts at the other. There is then such a splashing and beating of wings that it is difficult to see what the fighters are doing. Suddenly the hen leaves her nest, she can be seen walking down the bank, and, leaping into the air, flies quickly towards her mate and helps to drive the intruder away, following him for ten yards or more; then returning, she goes back to her eggs, while the male, taking all the glory of the fight, proudly swims round and up and down his small but well-protected estate, as it might be termed. On this bright summer morning I saw this pretty episode of wild-bird life several times repeated, as one and then another coot approached so closely to that part of the water protected by the male birds.

After this excitement and bustle it is some relief to turn into the shade and silence beneath the trees round the island. Swimming slowly about there, and feeding, is a dabchick, his nest being near, though never could we find it. Many attempts did I make to discover this nest, by watching the birds and also by searching. The latter exercise was rather exciting at times; the old punt leaked so

freely that one could only stay on board for a short period at a time. One morning I essayed to go for a short voyage in this weather-beaten craft, first taking the precaution to stop up all visible holes and cracks with clay. I got on swimmingly for a time; but when I was in the middle of the lake

DABCHICK SWIMMING WITH BODY SUBMERGED

I accidentally lost my quanting pole. This was a nice condition for a too venturesome naturalist to find himself in. The punt was slowly filling, and I could not pull up the pole, which was fixed fast in the bottom of the lake; the more I pulled the faster the punt filled, and at last I slipped, and the boat glided away from the pole. Looking

round I saw lying in the boat two large shells of the fresh-water mussel; using these, I cleared out as much water as possible, and tried to paddle the punt ashore with my hands—a long, tedious occupation, but which at last had its reward.

To see the little grebe at home we must go to one of the higher lakes.

Flickering balls of light seem to be playing over the still surface of the pond, the branches of many trees, thick with foliage on either side, wave to and fro, thus letting through the cheerful sunlight. Swallows are gliding over the surface, the snap of their beaks as they take in a fly being distinctly heard. Martins with their white rumps follow the swallows, and "dip" every now and then to take an insect from the water. Though not clear, the water can hardly be called muddy, and dark green seems to be its prevailing colour. The water-ranunculus with its white petals grows in small groups, and around these green and white patches tiny moor-hens are swimming. Their parents follow and pick up flies and feed their promising brood; but the tiny black birds capture many of these for themselves. On one side of the small lake is a rookery, young rooks are calling and clamouring for food, and as the old birds approach with supplies of delicacies, the youngsters are in danger of toppling out of their homes in their eagerness to

LITTLE GREBES AT HOME

get the first bite. All the trees on the lake-side are reflected in the water, their sentry-like reflections only being moved when the water-hens swim from bank to bank. Altogether this is a sylvan scene. A blackcap gives out his loud, mellow notes from near his nest; and a chorus of other bird music greets our ears as we wander round this picturesque stretch of water. The trees are tinted with a variety of green; for spring is yet young, they are not yet clothed in the more sombre garb of summer, and their reflections make the water still more a decided green. Each tree has its music: thrushes sing from the elms; the *coo-coo* of ring-doves comes from the cedars. The bushes are made charming with the notes of warblers—blackcaps, whitethroats, and willow-wrens. A chiffchaff calls merrily from an ash; and near are a pair of goldcrests. This lake, with the spring sunbeams playing on its surface, and the music all round about, is the home of the little grebe or dabchick. These birds love quietness; here is solitude as well as perfect harmony. We now know something about the bird's haunt; we will therefore watch the dabchick at home.

There is a ripple on the water, only a slight disturbance; the widening rings expand and the pond is soon still again. But watch the surface once more; the water is disturbed, and we see just the head and neck of a bird. The grebe quickly glances

round, then dives, and a few seconds later is up again to swim towards the water-ranunculus, then, diving, we lose sight of him. This is the male; his mate is sitting on her five eggs by the water's edge, and if we watch the small bush under which she is sitting, we shall see the male rise there or near the spot. He comes up a few feet to the right, swims under a

LITTLE GREBE

clump of rushes, and takes another look round. Seeing that there is no danger, he swims towards the nest and offers his mate some food. The hen takes this love-gift and then immediately dives. The bird now glances in the direction of his thankless mate, then climbs on to the nest and takes his turn at sitting. In half an hour the hen returns. I watched these birds for nearly three days, and seldom

saw one sit for more than half an hour at a time. Sometimes they changed after five minutes' sitting.

DABCHICK ENTERING NEST

It was a pretty exercise to see them change. The bird about to relieve the other came up at the back of the nest, then the sitting bird dived almost before the other's head showed above water.

When a dabchick leaves the nest it is the usual custom to cover the eggs. The nest is often built on the surface of the water, and when the eggs are covered it looks exactly like a clump of floating

weed. In a children's book published a few years ago, there was a very remarkable chapter on natural history. This dealt chiefly with birds, and there were some wonderful illustrations and descriptions of the inhabitants of birdland. One of these was the little grebe. The nest pictured was more like a crow's nest. We were told that if the dabchick thought there was danger near, it paddled its nest to a safer place, and the picture actually showed it in the very act—that is, with one foot on the shore and

DABCHICK SITTING

the other in the nest, pushing off in the same way as a boatman might send his craft into the water! The dabchick is a wonderful water-bird, yet with its

marvellous swimming and diving powers it has not yet reached such practice as this.

It is exceedingly interesting to note how quickly the sitting bird covers her eggs if any intruder approaches.

DABCHICK'S NEST COVERED

The instant footsteps are heard she stands in her nest, and, with her two feet, scrapes and pushes water-weeds over her eggs. She also uses her beak to lift the larger pieces. Once, when a little dog came along the path, the grebe covered her eggs and dived out of sight in the space of ten seconds. Each time she commenced sitting the first thing was to uncover the eggs, and then the water-weeds were arranged round her in such positions as

to be most convenient for recovering the eggs if further danger was threatened.

These birds sat on their eggs for three weeks, and then five tiny, fluffy balls of feathers—the young grebes—appeared. These little creatures, not much bigger than large walnuts, are remarkably clever swimmers and divers, and are so as soon as they leave the shells. I was able to get near them one day, as they were all swimming about near their nest. The parents were there also, and seemed to be in a great state of excitement. Instead of diving, the young all scuttled towards their mother, and a very pretty thing happened.

DABCHICK'S NEST UNCOVERED

She slightly raised her wings, and the youngsters—five in all—crowded underneath. When all were out of sight she dived, with her family under her wings, and came up some considerable distance away. This alone shows what perfect swimmers and divers these extremely interesting birds are.

When the young were about four weeks old the parents constructed another nest, but this was blown from its moorings during a violent storm. However, a third nest was made in a more secure place, and the eggs were duly hatched. A share in looking after the second brood falls to the lot of the young of the first family; and when all these are full-grown they make their way to other ponds, and are sometimes even driven by their parents, thus leaving the latter in sole possession of a haunt where there is not sufficient accommodation. "One-room life," or overcrowding, is far from being in accordance with the views of the knowing old birds of the little grebe species.

Near the grebes' home is a small spinny, or wood, and in this I found a most charming variety of bird life. About half-way down the strip of woodland stands the trunk of an old tree; holes surround the summit, and for a short distance the interior is hollow. A pair of tawny owls have their nest here, and when we found them in their home one of the birds was sitting on four eggs. As I looked into

the nesting-hole the eggs looked like those laid by the kestrel; but on a nearer inspection the supposed markings were found to be dirt and minute pieces of wood, which adhered to the eggs. The bird was in a corner, looking half asleep; but directly I looked into the hole she changed from a sleepy-looking bird to one moved by intense passion. She looked at me with wide-open eyes, fluttered round the space in the large hollow tree, and darted out past my face, and settled somewhere near in the spinny. This old tree had probably been the owl's home for years; although, as a rule, I believe these birds do not use the same place two years in succession, but have about three nesting sites, and use these alternately. In this tree was also the old nest of a jackdaw. This was built about a yard above the owl's eggs, and effectively cut off all light from above, except what entered through the hole in the side of the tree.

In another small wood in this district a pair of tawny owls yearly bring up a family. The nest last spring was immediately over a well-frequented road, and I believe the birds were successful in their efforts to rear a brood. The male wood-owl roosts during the day some distance from the nest, and I always knew where to find him. He would be seen sitting on a bare branch, seemingly fast asleep, but a shout from underneath caused him to turn his head and

look downwards with one half-opened eye. If he thought danger was threatened he flew away, always in the direction of the nest, and perched on a conspicuous branch; and once a blackbird spotted him. The noise and commotion which the latter then made was worth hearing, for with his angry cries he brought many other birds upon the scene; but the owl, preferring discretion to valour, flew onwards. In the tree in which this owl roosted there was a solid platform of thickly-matted ivy, and this was used as a table on which to feed. I should think that most of his food was brought here to be devoured, to judge by the number of pellets cast up. I often went up the tree to discover what this interesting adventurer had had for his last meal. Sparrow remains were often found, also plenty of fur and teeth, showing that he was also fond of rodents. The most remarkable thing, however, was the bones and feathers of a male blackbird. The bones formed one large pellet—the largest owl's pellet I have seen—and the tail feathers and parts of the wings were lying around. Perhaps these were the remains of a bird which came a little too close to the owl when scolding him; for if a wood-owl flies abroad during the day, blackbirds are the first to discover him, and almost always attack the larger birds if they go too near their nest; more probably it was taken in the silent hours of night when roosting in the

dark bushes near the nest. This, however, was the largest bird I have known a tawny owl to take.

The note of the tawny owl is a sound I dearly love to hear. It is associated with the more wilder woods of this country that I have roamed in; and to hear it night after night as I do, in our northern suburbs, makes one wonder how much longer these few remaining wild parts near to London will remain unspoiled by the inevitable speculative builder. These birds often keep me awake

SITE OF TAWNY OWL'S NEST

at night, hooting from the trees just outside my chamber window; and I know well what they are after—the sparrows roosting in the ivy. And they are welcome to all they can catch, for sparrows must be kept under, or they increase beyond all bounds. On my house there is a good-sized colony, and these, as far as numbers are concerned, are prevented from becoming overcrowded by my friends the owls.

The clear musical note, when uttered near, is to me exceedingly beautiful. On clear moonlight autumn nights, when the woods seem to be so silently sleeping, and glimpses of the moon are seen between the half-leafless trees as we wander through; when long shadows are cast by the tall, still pines, and most birds are asleep, is the time to hear the tawny owl to perfection.

Let us then go through the woods, as quietly as possible, and make our way towards the old weather-worn tree where the young were hatched last year. This stands on the edge of the wood, and when we reach it a herd of deer, just beyond, having heard our footsteps, move slowly off, down towards the silver-sheeted lake. On a jagged, wind-swept branch we see one owl sitting motionless, his form dark against the lighter sky. We stand in the broad shadow of the tree and watch this prowler of the night. Suddenly his feathers are ruffled, he leans forward, his wings are slightly raised,

and the clear noise—we can hardly call it a hoot—is given out, and it seems to ring down between the forest trees. An answer in the distance, another longer *hoo-hoo, hoo-o-o-o-o-o*, and the night-bird flies away, leaving the old branch trembling and creaking, the only sounds and movements on this calm night in autumn.

One of the features of a summer evening in the New Forest is the hooting of many wood-owls. Heard from across the bleak, wild moors, where the nightjar reels out his notes, the sounds are particularly weird and awesome. Whenever I hear this hoot I think of evenings spent in those wild parts, which I look back upon as some of my happiest times with Nature.

The young remain in their nest for some weeks, and when able to fly, keep near their old haunt. In the summer twilight I have often seen them sitting on a branch, repeatedly giving out their curious notes *kee-wick*, while their parents were beating a neighbouring meadow for food for their offspring. If these saw their elders approaching they flew towards them in prospect of a meal, while at other times the distant hoot was answered by the short, sharp *kee-wick* and the youngsters flew away.

The tawny owl is said to pair for life. I once heard in early spring one of these owls making

the most curious noises; he was evidently courting, and in a great state of expectant excitement. The hoot was given, started in the ordinary way, then it was stopped to be started again in a louder key. There was hesitation again, and then came the finish with notes which sounded as if he was filled with joy. The answer to all this was the notes *kee-wick*, *kee-wick*, and in the twilight I could see two shadowy forms, one chasing the other. I imitated his call as near as possible, to see what the result would be, and he, no doubt thinking me to be another owl, moved farther afield with his mate; and with a parting hoot reminded me that two is good company while three may be otherwise.

Not very far from the owls' haunt in the suburban park a pair of kestrels reared a family, and although I was constantly rambling round the fields, it was not until the young were able to fly that I really knew they had bred there, and then I could not find the nest which they had utilised. I often saw one of the birds hovering, however,

> "As if let down from the heaven there
> By a viewless silken thread."

Few of the smaller birds seem to fear the kestrel. If he flies over they heed him not, for they know he is no general enemy of theirs, like the sparrow-hawk. It is surprising what a number of small birds will be

found breeding near a kestrel. I have known a spotted flycatcher to nest in the same tree. If we visit the haunt of these birds and search for pellets underneath their nests, nearly all contain the remains of mice and beetles, very few feathers being found. I did once find a sparrow underneath a kestrel's nest, and I believe some feathers of a chaffinch, but there was nothing else to prove they fed on birds. The kestrel is undoubtedly one of the farmer's best friends, and all should be encouraged.

Why such a war of extermination should be waged against this entertaining and harmless species I never could understand. It may be because he goes by the name of a hawk. "Give even a bird a bad name and kill him," is in keeping with an old proverb; and a keeper once told me confidentially that he shot "all orks and howls" that entered his preserve. I think that this mistaken zeal is the chief reason why the attractive kestrel is so scarce in parts of England.

At all times of the year kestrels are worth attention. Whenever I see one I stop and watch it, for the light, buoyant flight; the graceful hovering; and, most wonderful of all, its soaring, are always worth noting. Let us go back a month or two and watch them soaring in the pairing season. The flat expanse of arable land before me looks dull and bare. Long, dark furrows are as lines down the fields; hedges dividing these are trimmed and leafless; the oaks and

elms are tinted with red on their smaller branches; some of the fields are green with young corn—and over one of these a skylark is singing his early love-song. A kestrel is seen gliding towards me, a little higher than the tall elms, and some distance away is seen another hovering over waste land in the corner of a field. The one nearest stops in his flight, hovers for a moment, then commences to rise in the air. He makes an upward swoop against the wind, turns in a ring, and is borne upwards in circles without any movement of his wings. Before the bird has gone far in his upward progress the other kestrel comes nearer; he makes a grand sweep across the wind up towards his mate, and commences soaring immediately underneath, only flying in an opposite direction. In this way the birds rise, the beauty of their flight and the pleasing effect of their crossing and recrossing in the well-measured circles is beyond description. Up, up they go until they look like dots in the blue vault of heaven. I have watched these kestrels on lovely spring mornings, when the atmosphere has been calm and bright, and when from immediately underneath it was almost as if I was the centre of the circle, and the acting birds were revolving round me, ever getting smaller and smaller. One second the brown back of one, and then the light breast of the other, gleaming in the sun at the same moment as they turn sideways to circle round. All this wonder-

ful exercise is performed without any visible movement of their outstretched wings; and from the time the birds commence soaring, until they look smaller than a skylark at its highest elevation, there is not even a single flap or beat of the wings. How is it done? If there was any wind it might be accounted for by supposing that the force of air behind on one side of the circle drove the actors forward to surmount the breeze when they met it. But I have seen kestrels soaring in a perfect calm, in the sweltering heat of summer, when even all birds except skylarks seem to stop their songs. I have seen the little red hawk go towards the blue with outspread wings, when even the silvery thistledown, dropping from the tall plants, falls to the greensward below instead of floating lightly away, and when a falling leaf drops like a stone from the highest tree; in those depressing days, when swallows sit on leafy trees and rest from the noonday heat, the kestrel goes upward unhelped by any wind.

Other birds besides hawks have this power of soaring. If one wishes to see the full mystery of such flight, it is necessary to see certain sea-birds in a gale. Many times I have watched lesser black-backed gulls sailing slowly and surely with motionless wings, in the teeth of the stiffest gales. The stronger the wind the more perfect and wonderful their movement seems to be; for it is not until they turn

and are carried like a bullet down wind, that one realises what a marvellous power this is which will cause even large birds to travel straight and sure against a tempest.

Another wonderful power the kestrel has is the power of hovering. Many other birds are able to hover. Titmice, finches, some of the warblers, and the kingfisher all hover at times to procure their food; but their movements are heavy and clumsy when compared with the hovering of the inimitable kestrel. Some observers have thought that kestrels can only hover in a wind, but this is a mistake. On the calmest autumn days the kestrel will keep motionless high up over its prey. When there is any wind at all, however slight, the kestrel must face it if he wishes to hover. How often one sees the bird lose its balance when watching its prey. However slightly it turns when facing the wind while hovering, it seems to fall, as it were, and has to circle round to again face the breeze. The force of the wind has little effect on a kestrel's powers. He can hover almost as well in a gale as in a perfect calm.

I mentioned before that a great abundance of small bird life was to be found in this suburban estate. The blackcap and garden-warbler were found breeding in proximity, almost underneath the tawny owl's nest. The garden-warbler seemed to prefer the boundary hedges, while the blackcap

LESSER WHITETHROAT'S NEST

seemed to choose the thick undergrowth, making his nest near the ground. The blackcap is a merry bird, always singing, even while sitting. I once saw a male blackcap building his nest. He was turning round and round, working the grasses into shape with his breast and body, and fluttering his wings, but all the time he was singing as merrily as though it were his early morning song. I stood watching this happy little worker and suddenly he saw me. His whole behaviour changed; he ceased his song, slinked off the nest, and strange to say never returned to complete it, although I did not so much as touch the bush in which he was building. The male is often seen sitting during the day, and soon after I photographed the nest pictured here, he returned, hopped into it, "worked" himself into a comfortable position, and seemed to be thoroughly at home.

Many warblers, especially the whitethroat and garden-warbler, build more nests than they really have need of. Sometimes these are only just commenced and then abandoned; at other times they are nearly finished. The garden-warbler makes at least one of these curious extra nests nearly every time of nest-building. A great many birds make these additional nests; I have found one on two occasions within a yard of nightingales' nests containing eggs. The reed-warbler often makes a rough nest in the same clump of reeds in which its proper

nest is situated. This additional one is nearly always a very clumsy structure, and is never used for eggs. Why these are made is a puzzling question. The birds probably begin them and then find that the situation is not suitable, and commence elsewhere; yet this does not account for the garden-warbler nearly always doing so. Perhaps, when the nest proper is completed, the male, not having so much to do, commences building on his own account.

BLACKCAP'S NEST

I like to be among the warblers in spring. A small suburban wood in the early morning contains such a concert of song and melody, that few, except those that have been among them at sunrise, have any idea of the charm. When the first beams of the

rising sun penetrate the leaves I have often heard a simultaneous outburst of song, seeming as though every tree had a concert in itself, for every tree in the wood contains its band of singers. No written description can picture the effect, or give any idea of the glorious and wonderful melody. Thrushes rise to the taller trees and call out their far-reaching notes. They sit facing the east, and the yellow beams light up their spotted breasts ; their beaks are raised, and they sing, as it were, to the sun. Blackbirds, with their more mellow songs, whistle out a few wild notes here, then fly on, and each green tree and every flower-covered corner is enlivened by their music. They travel round the wood, now rising to the height of the pines, then descend with fluttering wings and spread tail and settle on a holly bush ; but at every halting-place they give out their music, for they, too, sing to the sun. Then in the lower bushes and among the tall, wild parsley, whitethroats sing, hovering a moment over the hedge just to catch a fly, then drop back again ; but still they give their love-calls, and sing to their mates in the well-hidden nests. Garden-warblers sit in the smaller trees, and between their busy moments—they are hunting for early insects—they find time to sing to the morning, and a pretty song it is, sweet and like the sunbeams, bringing joy to all around. But of all the songs in the wood at early morning I love the blackcap's best.

He is such a small bird, and seldom shows himself, yet he gives out such loud notes, which seem to

GARDEN-WARBLER'S NEST

speak of freedom in its wildest sense. If we are fortunate enough to see him, it is a charming picture.

He sings with such force, and seems to be putting his whole soul into his vocal exercise, and as we listen we hear his song alone; the birds around are calling, but we heed them not, and until our bird ceases all our attention is riveted on him.

There is a brightness in these early morning songs which is not heard later in the day. All birds are pouring out their best strains, and be it robin, thrush or blackcap, or the merry willow-warblers, with their continual chiming, all seem to vie with one another to excel their near neighbours, and the result is a triumph of song, only heard by those who take the trouble to visit our suburban woods in the early morning. I say suburban woods, because in these places there are more birds. A small wood of a few acres in extent, surrounded with buildings, will be crowded with bird life, and more so than one of the same size far from any dwelling.

In another spinny of this suburban estate I found the lesser whitethroat breeding. When I discovered the nest it contained two eggs. I waited a few days, hoping the bird would lay the full clutch, but when I went to photograph it there was only one egg. Probably an egg-stealing bird took the rest. There were, I believe, two pairs of carrion crows nesting near, and these robbers were responsible for a number of lost eggs. The moor-hens' and coots' eggs were taken, and in one coot's nest of eight eggs, only one

young bird was successfully reared. The carrion crows in North London are becoming a nuisance; there was a number of nests last year at Winchmore Hill, and the young from these have made a large increase. Last spring a very great number of nests were robbed by these birds. They are becoming so common that, instead of keeping in pairs as they did years ago—when in these parts they were considered rare birds—they now flock together after the manner of rooks, and I have seen three carrion crows' nests within a few yards of each other.

Two pairs of cuckoos placed their eggs in nests on this suburban estate. One of these eggs was found in a robin's nest, and a day or two after the egg was placed therein, the robin was found dead outside the nest. Probably the cuckoo visited the nest while the robin was sitting, and the smaller bird attacked the larger; however, the real cause of the little tragedy will never be known. My opinion is that cuckoos often do visit their eggs to see that they are all right, and very likely this particular one did this. Robins are at all times pugnacious birds, and I suspect that this one got killed in a fight with a supposed enemy. The little bird's neck had been pierced, and this was the cause of death. The camera pictures the tragedy just as it was seen. One often comes upon pictures like this in Nature, and they just show that wild nature has its troubles and misery as well as human

nature. I have heard heartless birds-nesters put the argument that it cannot possibly matter taking birds' eggs, for the birds have no feelings, and no misery can be caused. Against this I have seen one or two little incidents which go to prove that birds are very sensitive, and have feelings akin to ours. I have found a redstart dead in its nest a few hours after the eggs were taken; I have also found a swallow dead in its nest; and I have known a carrion crow refuse to eat after its mate had been shot; it simply flew from tree to tree and called repeatedly, and at last moped and died. Then on one or two occasions I have been almost attacked by small birds when approaching too near to their young. There are other incidents I could relate, yet I think these are proof that birds love their eggs and young with a love which is almost human.

We found a great number of other nests on this suburban estate, including those of the great tit, wren, whitethroat, starling, tree-creeper, chaffinch, hedge-sparrow, partridge — this latter contained fifteen eggs. The linnet nested on the boundaries, and often we heard his song as he sat on the yellow gorse. There were two rookeries, one near the house, and the other by the side of one of the smaller lakes. While hiding underneath one of the trees containing several nests, and watching the little grebe, I heard a slight commotion above me; looking up, I

ROBIN'S NEST CONTAINING CUCKOO'S EGG: DEAD ROBIN BY NEST

saw a squirrel descending the tree, and in its mouth was a baby rook. The little thief passed within a yard of me, and then silently went on its way. Lapwings were daily seen in the meadows, and altogether we found a grand variety of bird life here.

All this shows what protection will do. This year we hope to find an increased number of our feathered friends; the more we see of them and the more we hear of their music, the more we love them. I wish there were more of these estates, where the birds are so well protected. Often the protection of birds on an estate is left to the discrimination of keepers; if such men are ignorant, and simply follow stock ideas and imaginations of their simple and more ignorant predecessors, there is very little hope for our birds. Happily there are many keepers who are also naturalists and take an interest in the birds on the estates. Let anyone who doubts my statements at the beginning of this chapter give them a trial, and I can guarantee that the result will be a pleasant surprise; they will live in a place surrounded on all sides with scenes of happiness and avian music; and if they will often walk abroad in the fields and woods, the birds will get to know them, and will not fly from their path. There is nothing more pleasing than to make friends with the wild denizens of woodland, field, or stream.

II

The Heron at Home

LEAVES cling to the oaks; they rustle sadly as the keen winter wind, passing first over the rippled lake, blows in gusts through the trees. Now and again dark-brown leaves or small branches drop and are lost sight of in the dying bracken; brown rabbits moving slowly about with short jerks or hops are almost invisible.

A kestrel hovering beyond the lake is difficult to see when he drops and hovers again, like a bird poised by an elastic string, between me and the giant oak.

It is not until one hears the unmistakable and piteous squeal of a young rabbit, that we again catch sight of the bird, fluttering and struggling with his prey. Young rabbits of all sizes may be found in any month of the year; I have come across them when they were just able to run about in the depth of winter. Now for a time there is silence as one bunny and then another pops his head out of his hole, listens, looks around, and then ventures out again.

A shadow passes over the lake, and a heron is seen gliding between the trees. He settles near the stream side. Just behind him are some bushes, and behind these is a carrion crow. For some minutes the heron stands motionless. His long neck is raised ; he is taking in every movement in the landscape. Now a rabbit making from mound to mound is noticed, and quickly his head is turned.

All this time the crow is slowly and seemingly innocently walking in the direction of the larger bird, but our heron does not seem to heed him. Nearer and still nearer he comes, pretending to be feeding, and then, when only a yard separates them, the crow runs swiftly forward and inflicts a sharp peck on the long legs of the unsuspecting heron.

A hop, skip, and a jump, an angry note, *fraank !* and the heron, evidently suffering from that uncomfortable feeling, that which mortals also sometimes experience, of having been "done," flies to the other side of the lake. Not so the crow. He is naturally exultant, and his sarcastic cry sounds uncommonly like the expression of a cunning boy who has taken another by surprise.

This scene was the most comical little episode I have witnessed in wild Nature, and I feel sure the cute old crow—the chief actor in the comedy—enjoyed the fun as much as I did as a looker-on.

The heron, evidently satisfied that no human in-

HERON'S NEST

truders are about, walks to the water's edge. A row of low reeds fringes the lake, and between these and the shore there is a strip of shallow water, the ground being trodden into slimy mud by cattle which come to drink. Into this water the heron wades, stalking slowly along, raising his long neck, and peering into the deeper water beyond the reeds.

If one wishes to see stalking brought to a fine art it is necessary to watch a heron. His legs are in the water to the depth of about eight inches, yet he walks on without leaving the slightest trace of a ripple. One leg is raised very slowly, and gradually, by a circular movement, is brought out of the water, and then as slowly dipped into it again, the bird sometimes taking a minute to progress one step. He sees something beyond the reeds, and rather than hurry, he risks losing the fish or whatever it may be.

The long beak is raised gradually higher and higher, and the bird leans forward, and we see one leg moving if we watch closely, for the movement is hardly perceptible. Now the leg is raised and pushed silently among the reeds, and by a slow, forward motion the heron is nearer to his prey.

Swish! The beak is plunged in and the bird seems to fall forward into the water, but the next second turns and walks quickly out with a small wriggling eel in his beak. This is rapidly swallowed, and after rubbing his beak on the grass he walks

rather hurriedly along the grassy bank and enters the water farther down.

There is a break in the reeds here, and from our place of concealment among the bracken it looks like a little bay. Here the bird wades into deeper water, until his lower breast feathers are hidden, and waits for about half an hour; but as sport is not equal to expectations he again takes to the reeds and soon catches two eels more.

At this end of the lake the water is deep; reeds and water-plants are absent, and it is necessary for our bird to walk along the bank. Although this is quite two feet above the surface of the lake he stalks along quite as carefully as if he was actually in the stream, the only difference being that a crouching attitude is maintained. As he nears the weeping willow in the corner he stands and intently watches the water. By stretching out his neck over the bank he seems to be noticing the movements of something some distance out.

How long will he remain in this position? It seems interminable; one would think he would tire. But a heron waiting and watching for prey will remain for long scanning what to us looks like a hopeless outlook. If a taxidermist were to set up a heron in some of the positions I have seen them for long patiently maintain, he would be laughed at, and be told by everybody that it was the most unnatural

piece of work that such an artist could possibly turn out.

Even good artists may spoil their work by drawing birds in what may be artistic, but which certainly are most unnatural, attitudes; photography, however, is now showing us the correct attitudes of birds and animals in their natural state.

Now the heron leans forward still more, and suddenly makes a great jump into the lake. What a mighty splash he makes, for as he touches the water the enormous wings are opened, and the bird, with the exception of just the tips of these, is completely submerged.

He is far out of his depth, yet, with his wings and legs used as paddles, he is quickly on the surface again. What does he care for a ducking, when in his beak is a silvery fish quite eight inches long? Instead of attempting to wade, he rises from the water and flies to the bank; then, with a vigorous shake of his feathers, sends the spray in all directions. The fish, making desperate efforts to escape, is first squeezed, or rather crushed, between the powerful mandibles, and afterwards tossed up in the air. It is then caught head foremost, and we notice the snake-like neck swelling as the fish passes down.

After this exciting adventure the heron goes to the bank and washes his beak, by first shaking it in

the water, and then wiping it several times on the grass. Whenever herons catch anything in the water, they always wash their beaks before going in search of more.

This bird was at least two hundred yards away from me, yet with my Goerz Triëder binoculars the scene seemed but five or six yards distant. Every field naturalist should equip themselves with these small but powerful glasses; with them Nature is seen in a new light.

A gun is now fired in the wood, and at the first report the heron raises its great wings; and on hearing the discharge of the second barrel, the fisher bird flaps slowly across the lake, over the rustling oaks, and is lost to view in the wild sky, reddened by the setting winter sun.

III

The Home of the Kite*

I WISH this chapter could be called "The Kite at Home"; but kites are now so exceedingly rare among British birds, that one can have very little opportunity of studying them in their own wild home. Although I spent nearly a week in or near their haunt I saw but two birds, and only caught a passing glance of one of these. Of the other I had a splendid view, and with my powerful Triëder binoculars watched it until only a speck was visible even through these. We were standing in a valley watching a raven and two buzzards, when into their midst there came, with a characteristic fine sweeping flight, a kite. The buzzards were soaring, repeatedly uttering their far-reaching call; while the raven was flying about somewhat lower down. The kite also started upwards, and

* All lovers of birds will be pleased to hear that last spring (1902), owing to strict secrecy being kept, a pair of kites succeeded in rearing their two young, and these left their nest early in June. How this was accomplished, and how the nest was photographed, will I hope be told in a future work.

with delightfully easy swoops was far above the other three birds. Then he slanted off across country, and with one or two flaps of his long wings was far out of sight. This is all I have seen of the kite; but I hope at some future time to be able to say more about him. I am looking forward

ANCIENT HOME OF THE KITE

to many happy days more to be spent in his wild haunt. It is not often one has the good fortune to see three such rare species as the kite, buzzard, and raven, within a few yards of each other.

The accounts I received of the persistent and systematic robbery of kites' nests were about the saddest things I have heard in connection with our rare British breeding birds. Year after year the eggs

are taken from a certain locality, and the birds are not given the slightest chance of propagating their species. In one of the nests here figured the kites did succeed in rearing two young ones; but just before these were able to fly, two prowling boys, who said they were searching for jackdaws' nests, unfortunately came upon this one, and the fact that it was of great size excited their curiosity, so that one climbed up and brought down the two fledglings. These were taken home, and when it was discovered that they were valuable birds the boys advertised them, and in return for one received a bicycle, while the other young kite died before it could be exchanged.

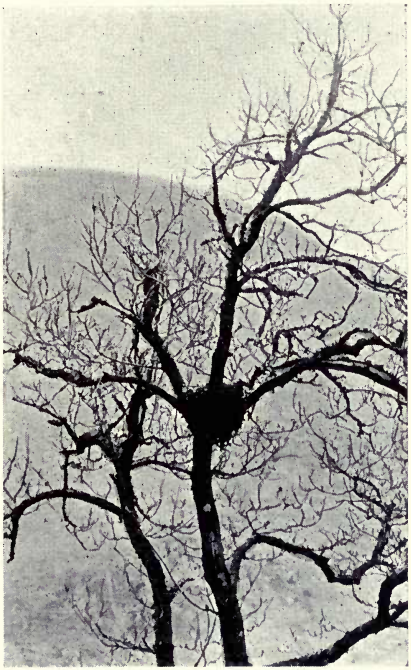
Another nest was built near a farmhouse. The farmer was paid to watch the nest, and barbed wire was placed round the tree, but this, too, was robbed by some unprincipled person. Similar tales can be heard each year. A certain person, I believe a dealer's agent, loots the nests every spring; and as the birds build in very much the same locality year after year, it is an easy thing to find them. What a pity it is that reliable watchers cannot be sent to this locality, two for each nest, and so give the birds a chance. If for a few years reckless adventurers who rob every rare nest could be kept at bay, the kite might be seen more frequently among the wild hills of these islands. It is a national disgrace that

ANCIENT HOME OF THE KITE

a bird, which was once so common, should be allowed to be gradually exterminated. When the last two or three pairs, which still each year try to breed, disappear, the last will be seen of our British kites. Even now they might practically be numbered amongst our lost British birds.

Long before we reached the kite's breeding haunt the sloping hillside wood could be seen. As we came over a hill, one out of many we had trudged over, we looked on one of the finest views that even a county of mountains and rivers could boast of. There were two great hills on before, with a rushing, tumbling stream between, winding in many devious courses over moss-covered rocks and grey boulders—such a stream that the dipper delights to haunt. At length we reached the wood on the steep hillside. It was rather difficult to walk up the crumbling, loose surface, but eventually we reached the middle, and there, nearly at the top of a low oak tree, was the kite's nest. It was with no small amount of admiration that I looked on this, one of the rarest—if not the rarest—nests of our British birds. I seemed to be on enchanted ground, there was something so novel and attractive in the surroundings. It was not the tree one would have pictured as containing the nest, it seemed such an insignificant little oak; there were others near much taller and larger altogether, yet here in an ordinary tree, easy to climb,

and not more than twenty-five feet from the ground, was the nest we had longed to find. By going up the hill a short distance it was possible to look into the nest, so steep was the slope. As we approached the wood a strange bird-call was heard, which was, I believe, the kite's note, but it was not repeated. The wood itself was like any other wood. Dead bracken was lying everywhere and hiding the loose, slaty accumulation on the ground.



KITE'S NEST

A green woodpecker repeatedly gave out his *yaf-yaf-yaf*. A mist or fine rain was rapidly coming on, and I was afraid it would make photography impossible; but fortunately the sky cleared sufficiently

to allow a series to be taken. The green woodpecker always calls more in wet weather, and on this occasion he was remarkably noisy. Another woodpecker—the greater spotted—was also heard in the wood, and we saw one flying overhead. Jackdaws were calling all around, and near by we came upon their breeding quarters in a slate cliff. Through the trees and beyond the winding river, another steep, dome-shaped hill loomed high before us, and the falling mist barely hid the reddish tint of the fallen bracken. The roar from the many little waterfalls in the river was unceasingly heard, but above the noise from these I heard a song, uttered low down in the valley — that of a robin. The strains were only faintly heard, and it seemed strange to listen to the song of this, one of our commonest birds, in the haunt of the rarest. There seemed to be indeed a wide gap between the two birds, one so common and the other so extremely rare. I could not help thinking of the time when the kite was common in our land, and it made one wonder if, before it is too late, protection will be accorded this fast disappearing bird, or whether it will really be allowed to be exterminated as a breeding species.

The other nest I was able to photograph was in a small larch wood on the side of a high, dome-shaped hill—one out of many round about. The larches were surrounded with a few straggling oaks, and

below the trees was the dipper stream. I love these streams; there seems to be both music and mystery in the sound of their splashing waters. When walking along their banks, we now and again catch a passing glimpse of the dipper. Before I visited these hills I had never seen this bird, and I must say the little creature was an object of extreme interest; he was so fearless when standing in the fastest running water, or when near the most turbulent waterfalls, and he

KITE'S NEST

seemed to belong to the stream as much as the trout which swam in the pools. His snowy breast was seen from a great distance as he "bobbed" on the grey rocks; but as we came nearer, he was off, ever following the winding course of the water.

KITE'S NEST

The kite's nest in this hillside wood was at the top of a fairly tall larch tree. The marks of the climbing-irons of the fellow who took the eggs were still plainly visible; without the aid of these it would have been difficult to reach the nest. Overhead buzzards were circling, and whistling a note something like a long-drawn *whew;* and a raven was seen. The hills around were bare, and this little

KITE'S NEST

wood was like an oasis in a hilly desert—a charming little retreat, just such a place that one would have expected to find the kite had selected for a home.

I was speaking to a gentleman who remembered the time when kites were a fairly common species, and he told me how he had watched one on several occasions fly down to the river opposite his house and take goslings from the water. Would that the bird might once more become as common, without wishing harm to the geese. There are, nevertheless, plenty of farmers and landowners about who would only be too willing to part with a few goslings if once again this graceful bird could haunt their lands.

It seems hopeless to look to Parliament to do anything for our rarer breeding birds. If anything is done it must be done by private effort. Why does not someone with means come forward and offer to protect a few of our rarest species? For an inconsiderable sum of money it would be possible to protect the kite. Each nest—three at the very most—would require two watchers for a period of about seven weeks. If anyone would supply funds I would undertake to make all necessary arrangements. The kite is not a migratory species; it is only at very long intervals that single birds are observed on the east coast. These are evidently wanderers from the continent, but they are always shot before they can pass westward. It is clear from this, that if the few last

remaining British specimens are killed, the kite will be gone for ever from these islands. If the kite is to be protected it must be done soon; if not, the time is not far distant when we shall look upon this noble species as a lost British bird.

THE DIPPER'S HAUNT

IV

Sparrow Town

FOR years the ivy on the house has been the unchallenged home of a colony of sparrows. How many pairs there are no census has yet shown; but year in and year out they live and increase, in spite of enemies by day and night.

Sparrows are like schoolboys. We all know how at different seasons the British boy introduces a new game. One day it is hoops, and then suddenly not a hoop is to be seen; all the talk is about "alleys" and "sixers." Then, like the hoops, the marbles are gone, and tops are seen buzzing through the air, and sometimes through windows. So it is with sparrows. With the very first days of spring sunshine we see two males dash from the house to the ground, a crowd of other sparrows follow, all of whom like to see a fight as much as any schoolboy.

The two birds now "go for" each other in a most desperate manner. Feathers fly in all directions, while the hen for whom they are fighting sits in a bush and cheers the combatants to stimulate courage.

The crowd looking on *cheep* and *chow* their very loudest, and hop excitedly around, and when at last one of the fighters lies panting on the ground, the victor and the mate he has won hop to another bush, and while the hen sits on a branch, the male, with drooping wings and spread tail, hops round bowing, and at every opportunity trying to attract attention in every way he can. As the hen does not take much notice, Cock Sparrow redoubles his efforts; but still the unresponsive one looks everywhere but at her lover. We can imagine his thoughts and pity him. All this fighting, noise, and excitement was for her; but as yet this is poor reward. *He* stops in his dance and looks again; *she* is innocently polishing her beak on a branch!

Weech-weech, chow-chow-chow—each note uttered in a louder key; but still no response. In desperation he hops to the branch, looking the very picture of concern, when suddenly he feels a violent peck on his back. At last, then, she condescends to notice him; but in what a rude way!

No matter, Cock Sparrow is happy; he begins his ridiculous dance, and again bows and scrapes before her. This is too much for Mrs. Sparrow; she flies to a top branch of an apple tree, but is immediately followed, and again the two descend to the ground, and her mate continues his expressive exercises.

She can stand this no longer. Darting at him, she

inflicts one or two vigorous pecks; but these have little effect, he takes them as a lover might a kiss. The enraged hen now catches hold of him by the scruff of the neck—that is, she holds a bunch of his neck feathers in her beak—and actually swings him round, then she shakes her head violently, almost pulling the feathers out; and poor Cock Sparrow now *cheeps* and *chows* in distress, but he is too much in love to retaliate.

The hen is evidently very angry, and after a little more punishment, she releases and hops round him, "talking" like any angry woman, and no doubt telling him not to make a fool of himself, but to get on with nest-building. Such is a comical little incident in Sparrow Town; yet the most remarkable thing was the meek way in which the male took his correction.

The fights for the hens are the first things of importance in Sparrow Town. Then, like the schoolboys' marbles, they suddenly stop, and all is tranquil. Nest-building now comes on apace. Birds are seen on the garden beds, picking up pieces of dried grasses, sometimes as much as they can fly away with; while others travel to and from the fowl-run, choosing the softest feathers and taking these to the nest.

Then comes the time when the eggs are laid, and we see little of the hens. But the males show what good mates they are, for from sunrise to sunset they

fly to and fro, the majority having green caterpillars in their beaks, while occasionally the fare is varied with a short piece of fresh green grass.

At last the young birds arrive, and what a noise there is! Hens make the greatest disturbance; they sit outside their nests and chatter for long together. I well remember one—she used to sit on a fence outside my study window, and the noise she made was really phenomenal, and time after time she had to be driven away.

My favourite cat knows as well as I do when the population of Sparrow Town is increased by new arrivals. There is nothing that pussy fancies more than a plump young sparrow, and for days together she sits under the ivy, springing forward at everything that falls. A large number do fall from their nests, and early every morning Minx walks along the path, sniffing to right and left, and sometimes fledglings are so plentiful that she can swallow them as though they were oysters. But at length the baby birds find they have wings, and essay to fly from the ivy to the apple trees below.

Then begins another stage of life and excitement in Sparrow Town. There is as much fuss, or more, made over a sparrow's first flight, as a mother makes over the first tooth of her child. We see the young sitting outside the nest, and when one of the parents approaches with a beakful of food one of the more

venturesome of the brood jumps forward and falls.

The little creature flutters its wings violently, and no doubt is surprised to find it can fly. But as it descends, the parents fly by its side, and with the most emphatic calls and cries, try to lead it to some high branch; for Minx, knowing what is going on, makes ready to spring as the young flier nears the ground. A dozen sparrows follow, and the noise becomes deafening; but all escape the cat, and the fledgling settles, panting and frightened, on a shaking branch, and then presently follows its elders to a safer place.

One bird now feeds those remaining in the nest, while the other looks after the too eager youngster. I always know when a young sparrow has left home, for the noise made by the other inhabitants of Sparrow Town is exceeded alone by the cries made when a fight is in progress during the earlier part of the season.

The last stage of life in this feathered colony is a tragical one—to the sparrow. It happens at night. Long after all have gone to roost there comes a large white bird—a barn owl—which does not approve of overcrowding. He sits on an outbuilding, and with his wide-open, dreamy eyes watches the ivy. He may sit there for an hour, he may sit there for only ten minutes; then he silently sallies

forth, and hovers still more silently in front of the house, about a foot away from a sleeping sparrow.

There is a loud noise, as he seems to throw himself among the loosely hanging leaves; a squeal of a captured bird is heard, and as the white form —gliding away like a ghost—leaves Sparrow Town for a time, and is lost in the darkness of night, I know that the population is lessened by at least one of its noisy inhabitants.

V

The Pageant of the Seasons

COAL-TIT

THE pageant begins with music. The full notes are uttered by a wren, perched on the rough top of a decayed post; this is covered with lichen, and green moss hangs from its crumbling sides. The old post, which once marked a part of the boundary of the now deserted wood, is weather-worn; beetles have bored their tunnels about it, and it forms the home of hundreds of other tiny insects, Here and there the rotting wood has been pecked away, showing where the wren has been "digging" for food. Now he sits and sings on the top of what is a picturesque old post; ivy trails at its base, and will soon quite cover it, and altogether this forms a fitting perch for this, almost the smallest of birds, to open as it were the grandest pageant that man can look upon. Again and again he gives

out his song, uttered with his tiny brown tail bobbing in unison with the notes, then he stands still and listens; once more peers into the crevices which have already been "worked," just to see if his keen little eyes have missed any insects, then hops gaily on his perch and sings again. His song finished, he flies to a heap of faggots and for the time is lost to view.

The pageant has begun. The sun, for the first time, after the melting of the snow, is rising to shed his beams on the country that a mighty change is to pass over. It is a pale light which first shines on the leafless trees and bare land; but the earth seems to receive the slight warmth with gladness, while birds hail the light and warmth with song; for others, on hearing the wren's notes, give forth their own. Under the shadow of the large trees the morning air is still chilly and seems still to have something left of the touch of winter; but squirrels in the higher branches seem already to have forgotten there has been any hard winter weather, for they play for joy and jump from branch to branch as though this were indeed the first spring day.

The pageant proceeds slowly at first. It is difficult to realise that it is moving; but as days pass, little flowers begin to open surely as though they were Nature's eyes, for chickweed is first of the coming

procession to show its petals. On the greensward of the less-frequented paths, its hundreds of tiny white flowers, peeping from amongst a mass of emerald green, tell us, in common with the wren's song, that spring is fast approaching. Then with the increasing sunshine comes the lesser celandine. This, the brightest of spring's first flowers, always appeals to us, and each can with the poet say:—

> "There's a flower that shall be mine,
> 'Tis the little celandine."

And why? Because it is the gayest forerunner of the fuller resurrection from winter death which is yet to come. The first scenes in a great pageant always attract extra attention, and although they may be of less account compared with the greater things to follow, they always command the notice of onlookers; and so it is with the passing of the seasons. The wren's song, petals of chickweed, the yellow star-like discs of the celandine, and the *cooing*

COAL-TIT

of the pigeons in the yews all have their peculiar fascination. They are the more welcome now, because they are the first harbingers and sounds of spring. A few weeks hence the woods will be more fully transformed; the sky will have a deeper blue; but nevertheless we now admire the trees and bushes, although they are only tinted with red, and as yet wanting their fuller foliage; or the sky with the light flecks of vapour floating across the pale blue background. We like to look forward to spring, especially when it is near. When the hours and days which are all too short have passed, it seems such a long time to wait for the violet flower, or the primrose to bloom once again. But when they are actually with us, they seem ever to impart to the joyous revival of the countryside a charm it did not possess before. In the days of early spring we can watch more closely the beginning of that great struggle which is about to take

COAL-TIT

place in Nature. There is a mystery more great in the coming on, and the passing of the seasons, more wonderful than philosophy ever yet fathomed or properly interpreted. But one by one Nature is disclosing her hidden secrets to those who would know them, and naturalists who choose to study Nature in her own world will see and find out more of these mysteries than mere students of the museum or the study. Ordinary observers look upon trees and flowers and admire them; they listen to the music of birds and are fascinated; the gambols of the rabbits, or the playing of squirrels in the pines, afford them entertainment, but they little think of the gigantic forces which have been at work to produce all of these scenes and sounds. There is a struggle now commencing all round so powerful that few can realise, or even imagine what it all means. Every tree and shrub which we see around us has grown at the expense of its weaker neighbours; above and beneath and all around, wherever we fix our eyes, we cannot but notice signs of the struggle in the past and tokens of that just beginning.

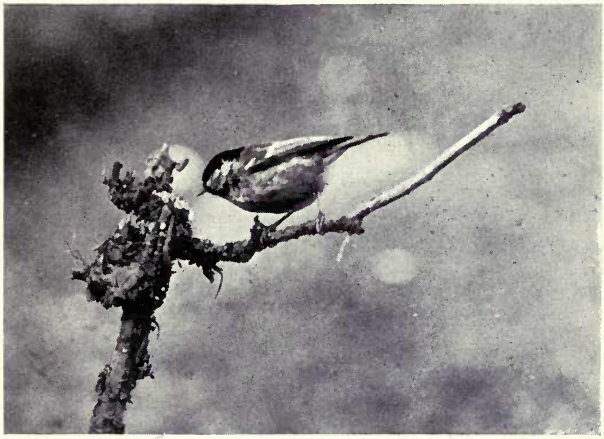
Six weeks have come and passed. I still watch the scenes in Nature's pageant from the woods. Again it is early morning, and the wren is singing. He is perched on the same post from which he did his part in opening the pageant, but what a different

WREN'S NEST

wood he now sings over! The then bare wood is now transformed into one of pale yellow. Primroses cover every yard of surface just round about where I stand, while farther afield violets and the "wind-flower" hold their own. It is the real awakening of spring, when primroses bloom and the violet hangs its drooping, deep blue head. On the older clumps, where the trees have been cut down, primroses have found a place to grow, and all around and about the wren's old post they gleam from a mass of green. The little brown bird sings louder and longer now. In the midst of his song another wren appears, and in her mouth is a dead leaf, with pieces of dust-covered cobweb still clinging to it. She just stops to bob her tail, "flick" her wings, and then disappears in a thick bush, and is soon followed by her singing mate. They are building their nest, and the male must needs sing on nearly every journey to and from the half-finished home.

Here we may look around on the beauties of Nature, and note the delicate and harmonious colours with which she has painted the wood; we may look above and observe the young green leaves fast opening, and beyond these, and contrasting with them, the deeper blue of the sky. No wonder, then, that the wren seems to be inspired to sing. And in the trees, amongst the highest branches, the chiffchaff calls; and lower down willow-

wrens are chiming. Woodpeckers are at work boring their nesting holes, and the curious drumming noise which they seem to use as a call-note is constantly made. Many nests of thrushes already contain eggs, and robins are busy building underneath the hedges.



COAL-TIT

It is when the sun is sinking in the west all of this wonderful awakening of spring is more fully seen. The evening is still, the light wind is humming through the trees—very different to the moaning of a winter day. In a distant rookery the birds can be heard squabbling and talking; doves are cooing more peacefully in the darker portions of the wood. Black-

birds give forth their pure, full notes, now from one far-off corner, then from places nearer; then again they flutter on, and the interval between their songs is filled up by thrushes. Honeysuckle leaves are opening, and in warmer spots the bushes now are as green as the hedgeside banks. Then when we leave the trees, the woodland sounds of spring seem to fade into approaching night, and looking back, the tall, dark spires of pines stand out in sharpest profile against the darkening western sky. Little clouds of humming gnats or midges are also out around our head, and if we look along the hedge, these thousands of flies look like smoke rising from the branches. Above, the evening star is seen bright and peaceful, and so the day dies, and all things seem to be at rest, the busy day now being followed by the soft and sweet hush of eventide in early spring.

The pageant is now at its height. I wander into an orchard, and there see the great sight in all its fresh attractions. Acres of blossom-covered trees are here, seeming to be overburdened with a profusion of white petals. Thousands of insects are unconsciously fertilising the flowers, and hundreds of birds are feeding on the insects. There is quite a babel of bird-music, all the notes being so full of the happiness which spring brings in its train, that I would not have one less. For perfect music let us choose the songs of birds, when heard now among

the flowers and leaves of all-conquering spring. These may well fascinate us in a way not to be described. Look on the scene spreading before us. A blackcap is on a spray of blossom; he hops to another branch, and knocks some petals down on his short journey; these float slowly down, and find a resting-place on the ground. If we look up the rows of trees there is a continual shower of these petals, and birds cause myriads of them to fall. The blackcap sings, with raised crest, and after the notes he snatches a caterpillar here, then "hawks" for a fly, and sings merrily again. The blackcap is to the woods by day what the nightingale is to them at night. His loud, wild notes seem in perfect harmony with spring sunshine and the may-blossom growing in such profusion over the rippling brook. There is a sweetness in his song which speaks of brightness, and the day seems gayest when he is singing. At evening the nightingale gives out his passionate song, and we love to listen amongst such still, dark surroundings; a wood without a nightingale would be like a meadow bare of flowers. But give me the blackcap by day, his song seems to be so altogether associated with sunshine and flowers. Imagine a spring without a blackcap's song, or the hawthorn bushes white with may without the warblers, each would have a chief charm missing.

From the orchard I go to the meadows; for there

BLUE-TIT

I see the spring pageant in another phase of its glory. Over the broad expanse of golden buttercups butterflies are flitting, and whinchats are calling as they sway to and fro on the tall, slender grass stems.

Higher aloft still, the skylark loudly sings his song, and I must stop to find him. At length he is seen—a dot in the limitless expanse of blue; but though so small he floods the meadows with music, which is one of the dearest sounds of the country. The young green trees, the bushes and flowers, seem, as it were, to respond to his notes of love, and to give out music of their own. It is real enjoyment to lie among the buttercups and to watch the varied life of this fresh spring day. The hours spent in communing with Nature and

BLUE-TIT

trying to understand her teachings are the happiest of a naturalist's life. In the hawthorn bush there is now a rustling, and a bullfinch half shows himself—a tinge of red amongst the white may. His breast can be seen swelling as he "pipes"; the wind sends a hanging spray of blossom between us, and when this moves he is gone. The fields now resemble a cloth of yellow, although in corners and on the greensward bordering hedges there are patches of veronica, which in their simple beauty outshine all other spring flowers at this time. These are half hidden among the shorter nettles and grasses, and their tiny deep blue faces seem to welcome the sunbeams. I love the germander speedwell above all wild flowers; there is a beauty in this veronica that no one could pass over.

When the days of spring gradually fade into the longer hours of sunshine of summer, we notice it less than the beginning or end of any other season. There is no awakening as in the early days of spring, or any fading beauty like that of dying summer, when the autumn trees are clothed in golden-coloured foliage. And there is no feeling of sorrow such as passes over us when we see the last of the falling leaves, or listen to the farewell twitter of a solitary swallow. No; spring glides into summer, all things being in harmony.

The first wild rose of summer, high up over the

bush, showing itself from a bunch of buds on a hanging spray, always seems to be a token that summer is here. I do not like to pick the first of the roses; let them speak to others as they do to me. It is a great grievance to rob the countryside of all its wild flowers; pick one here, and another there, and no one will see the gap. Some of the flowers in the nearer suburbs of London are gone almost before the buds are fully open. In the early spring I always know where to find a patch of lovely violets; being known to no one else, it is a delight to see them growing until the grasses rise up and hide them.

The moving pageant is again seen by the stream. Trees fringe the low and rough banks; here and there are bushes with one or two roses hanging low down over the water. It is a delightful little stream; just here it forms a pool of clear, sparkling water; a few yards farther up miniature waterfalls and tiny cascades are in keeping with moss-covered stones. As one wanders on, small torrents run through narrower channels, widening again to another pool, and yet more falls, where the water as it drops makes summer music. A magpie darts from her nest in a low tree; finches drinking at a pool are startled; some sparrows fly up, but soon return to their splashing baths. I like to see a sparrow bathe; he seems to so enjoy the water; and then, when thoroughly soaked, he sits on a low branch, flutters

SWANS' DOUBLE NEST

his wings, and *cheeps* and *chows* to himself in such a contented style, and at length when nearly dry enters the water again. A cuckoo silently settles in the trees above, and calls many times, "laughing" between every few notes. The magpie returns, flies round the trees, then alights in a tall ash. Swallows dart up and down above the water, sometimes "dipping" when taking a fly. Their nests are under the old rustic bridge, and by the side of this, in a hole in the ground, a pair of coal-tits have a nest; we carefully lift a patch of grass, and find it full of hungry young birds, with beaks wide open, all clamouring for food. Some angry notes are uttered by the mother bird hard by, and we replace the turf and proceed up the stream. *Beck, beck*, calls a frightened moor-hen, while her little black brood scramble up the banks, and when all are concealed behind stones or under bushes, she swims underneath a thick bush where the wild rose branches dip into the stream. Water-voles—the beavers of our English streams—are seen sitting on the banks; they stare well at any intruder, and seem surprised to be disturbed, for few people wander along this secluded Hampshire brook. Running as it does through that great tract of moor and woodland the New Forest, it is as unfrequented as some of the delightful "dipper" streams of the north.

A flash of green darts by, then another, and

another, these being followed by three more of brightest blue, dazzling and changing colour as this family of kingfishers skim on round the turn. I follow as silently as possible, a difficult matter where one has to make a path through the underwood. I peep round the curve and see a shaking branch which the birds have just left; it strikes the water as it trembles, making little ripples. By still pushing on I am fortunate to see the brilliant-plumaged birds sitting on twigs by the water's edge; they see me, however, and double back down the stream. Kingfishers if followed will nearly always try to dart back unobserved to the place from where they were first seen. I am able to get close several times, but the watchful old birds, when once disturbed, are shy, and leave, always followed by their young, flying up or down stream in single file, making the clear brook more attractive by their presence, while the sense of solitude is more complete. For where we find the kingfisher, there Nature is commonly undisturbed. A kingfisher will return to the same perch day after day, and if once this is discovered, an observer has only to sit on the stream-side and wait. There is no necessity to be concealed, as I have proved many times, perfect stillness being all that is necessary, and in this way I have had these brilliant birds within three yards of me, and on one occasion even less than a yard intervened.

Here the stream broadens out, and near the banks water-ranunculus is in full flower. The petals and leaves are disturbed as a tiny fish, basking in the sunbeams which penetrate the leafy trees, darts away, frightened by our shadow falling on the water. Two young water-voles dive from the opposite bank, and a water-hen calls; a sable blackbird flies away uttering a loud chatter, surprised while drinking in a crystal pool formed by the water dripping into a shallow basin of clay; and some squirrels farther from the bank dart up a tree as the blackbird flies past. The vegetation on the opposite bank moves; a rustle, and a weasel appears, the lithe, arch-backed little cannibal sniffs the flowers, and then the ground as he slowly passes on. We notice he is in a vole's track, or well-trodden pathway, and we pity the vole, for we well know what his fate will be. But to follow this stream to its source would occupy too much time, and if I dwell on one part of this

COAL-TIT

pageant of Nature long, the reader will tire. We must try to imagine the scenes that would pass before us if we tracked this rivulet to the distant spring whence comes its supply of crystal water. There is something in a stream like this which seems to fascinate the farther we follow it, and as its banks lessen in width, the flowers, birds, and rippling bubbles seem to speak of deeper mysteries.

> "There's something in that ancient superstition,
> Which, erring as it is, our fancy loves.
> The spring that, with its thousand crystal bubbles,
> Bursts from the bosom of some desert rock
> In secret solitude, may well be deem'd
> The haunt of something purer, more refined,
> And mightier than ourselves."

So let us leave the happiness of the birds, the soft sound of water under woodland trees, and the fulness of life everywhere, and pass on.

In the sultry days of July the birds cease their songs. By the middle of the month the woods and orchards, which four weeks ago were filled with a chorus of happy music, are now almost silent, and with the exception of a few robins no bird-notes are to be heard. Come into the meadows, however, and see the profusion of flowers which are here. What we have lost in song is now made up in a rich supply of wild flowers. The roadsides are covered with a chequered carpet of growths as brilliant and as

fragrant as sunbeams and showers can make them. In the shade we may rest and enjoy the varied outlook. Dragon-flies, with wings that glisten like bronze and gold, poise themselves a moment, and then are gone. The meadow is enlivened with the calls of grasshoppers, and on the taller grasses blue butterflies are resting. Burnets, gay in their suits of metallic green and crimson bodies, fly with heavy flight from flower to flower, and small heaths and copper butterflies flit among the lower grass stems. At the end of this month the pageant seems as it were to stand still; there is a pause—a gap between summer and approaching autumn.

SMALL HEATH BUTTERFLY

In a distant wood, a tree—I think it is a silver poplar—stands out high above the others. When the sun is setting, this tree throws a long shadow across the green tops of lesser trees, and as this slowly lengthens, we can realise that summer is passing, though slowly. With the last beams of the departing sun, the shadow is gone, and we watch

another day come to its close. And so the days—the shadows of the year—creep on with their regular and certain pace, and with them pass the seasons.

August, the month of harvest, is with us; the evenings are now the best of the year, for at reaping-time we see some of the best sunsets of the whole year. I think the human mind can be brought into closest touch with Nature's God when looking on a fine sunset. There seems to be a connecting-link between us and the higher life when the sun goes down amongst the most beautiful or most sublime of Nature's surroundings. There is such a calmness in a harvest sunset, so unlike the wild grandeur of a stormy winter sky at evening, when the torn, straggling clouds seem, as it were, like smoke rising from a heap of fire in the west, driven with such rapidity towards the zenith. Why is it that a

LARGE WHITE BUTTERFLY

summer sunset is more impressive than a sunrise? Is it because it leaves behind all the most attractive things of day? Before us are many broad acres of cornfields, some cut and already red with waving

NUTHATCH

poppies; swallows are flying over the shocks; while in the distance the ranges of low hills are yellow with standing crops; but these are almost hidden by the blue mist of summer heat, the whole making a great picture of Nature's beauty and wonderful

resources. In addition to the soft music of this harvest evening, the sun goes from our view accompanied by a pageant of many-coloured August clouds. Could anyone look upon such a picture of concord without being fascinated? When I look upon the sublime in Nature my mind seems to be lifted higher than earth; the scene almost becomes a vision of Paradise. The sinking sun may at times affect our inmost soul more than any other of Nature's phenomena. A sunset awakens many sweet memories in the mind; we think of things which are past, and to hours spent with Nature, which have always given enjoyment.

But to return to the cornfields. On a fence at my side there sits a baby spotted flycatcher; it calls many times, and shakes it wings, then its mother appears, and in her beak is a number of flies, which are given to the youngster, its little body being agitated with pleasure. Although I am only four feet distant, the parent soon returns, and again gives the young bird more food. Screaming swifts, looking like crescent-feathered darts, skim across from hamlet to cornfield, now nearly out of sight in the pale blue vault of heaven, and again almost touching the yellow sheaves in their downward swoop. A solitary hare sits near the margin of the uncut corn, then runs in along his own made pathway. Swallows twitter, and yellow-hammers sing from tele-

graph wires over the road. Underneath these, hedges are festooned with wild clematis; nodding harebells and field scabious give the lane a border of two distinct tints of blue, intermingled with the brilliant scarlet spots of straggling poppies. But as the twilight of August slowly fades into the serene quietness of night, the birds stop their songs—seemingly reluctantly—and the colours of flowers are lost in the gloom of darkening night.

NUTHATCH

An August night is as interesting as the day, however. Especially is this the case in cornfields. These places give a full supply of food to numbers of rodents, and also attract as many owls in the night as they do kestrels and sparrow-hawks during the day. Barn-owls may often be seen on moonlit nights sitting on corn shocks waiting for mice; and anyone who waits at such a time will hear many a dying cry of some small animal, the only intimation that comes of these nocturnal tragedies in the fields.

Before the last of the sheaves are gathered in the trees assume touches of autumn's colour, only a leaf

tinted yellow here and another touched with spots of crimson, but still enough to tell us that the pageant of the seasons is still on the move and soon will pass.

There is now a fresh keenness in the early morning air of autumn which makes us think of our guns and dogs. Two coveys of partridges rise near and join, and enter a distant turnip field together. The heavy mists of evening become denser during the night, and now soon after sunrise the distant trees are hidden and those nearer have a misty appearance. Not a leaf is moving. The heavy autumn dew covers grass blades and flowers with myriads of sparkling dewdrops "far brighter than pearls"; butterflies, bees, and other insects are bedewed with tiny drops of water. Where the sunshine falls on fences, gates, and tree-trunks insects are seen crawling and basking in the warmth, being awakened out of a stupor which, if the weather had been colder, would have meant death. As we walk towards the lake with the sun behind there seems to be a halo of diamonds round our shadow on the grass; this is more apparent while we move, the dewdrops nearest the shadow seem to throw off a brighter lustre for a moment, then a grass blade here and there seems to be studded with gems more brilliant than genuine stones. Move ever so slightly and the colour is gone and cannot be seen again. Near the lake-side, clumps of candle rush all have a spider's

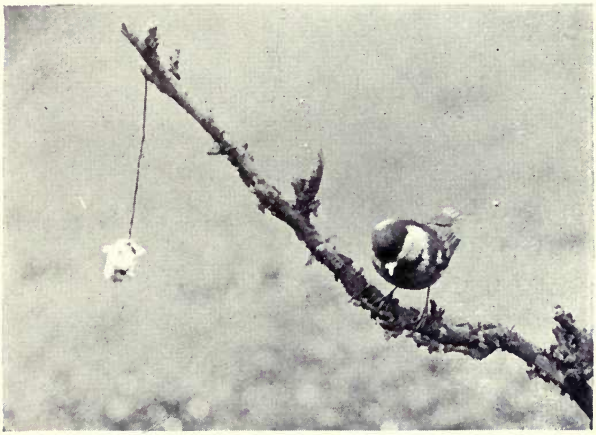
web woven in them, and these show now that the morning dew is brightened by the sun. At the end of the lake a weeping-willow, almost hidden in the autumn mist, droops over the still water. If we hide here and wait for the mists to rise we shall see more of bird life than in the fields. As we near our place of shelter we come unexpectedly upon a herd of deer; they just look in our direction and then scamper away out of view. When the sun reaches his zenith we can see right across the lake, and all but the far distance is misty. The deer, now resting under the shade of trees, can also be seen reflected in the water; for the surface is like a mirror, only disturbed as a gleaming silver fish jumps out, or when the water-birds loudly paddle and splash near the edge of the reed-fringed shore. Now round about the willow there is a movement, and out swims a duck. Slowly she proceeds down the lake, leaving behind a track of ripples in the shape of the letter V, ever widening, until the ends touch each shore. Others join her, and then all engage together in a merry splashing and loud quacking. On the opposite banks seven moor-hens are leisurely feeding. Some are resting on the dusty ground; for although the dews are so heavy the ground seems to remain dry. There is this difference between the dew of autumn and that of earlier summer; the latter rises out of the ground and saturates the lower parts of the plants

A FOREST FIRE

and roots with a moisture which in its effect is as good as a shower of rain. The dew of autumn is caused largely by the water-charged atmosphere condensing on the leaves and grasses. If we notice the ground underneath the plants, and indeed almost anywhere, it will be found to be dry, with the exception of the top layer of dust, and even this is generally also dry. The moor-hens sit down and work a slight hollow in the ground, very much after the style of a sparrow when having a dust-bath; there they sit and lazily gaze about with half-closed eyes, rejoicing in the sun's warmth. One will occasionally rise, pick up an insect or worm which has approached too near for its safety to be ensured, and then returns to the resting-place. Another water-hen leaves the lake, flutters up the bank, and is no sooner there than she is attacked by one of her own species. Round and round they go, repeatedly striking and sparring at each other. Now they stand a yard apart with wings slightly opened, and head and neck laid on the ground, but always facing one another. Again they dash at each other, then one turns round and swiftly runs away.

The loud note of a goose, *kee-wonk*, is heard from the distant end of the lake, and reminds us of nights spent on the mud flats of the coast, where the deep roar of the punt-gun and the lesser reports of breech-loaders rouse the night-feeding birds, whose notes, uttered while they fly in the light of the winter moon,

slowly die away, until the long string of geese becomes lost in the gloom of night. These memories of sights and sounds are dear to all sportsmen. *Kee-wonk* again, and two great birds leave the water, circle round, and are soon far away and disappear in



COAL-TIT. SEEING!

the mists of autumn. Among the water-hens is a smaller bird, and through my field-glass this is seen to be a water-rail. It does not wander far from the reeds, and at the slightest sign of danger quickly runs to shelter. A herd of deer is resting under the larger oaks feeding on acorns, which the fitful breeze occasionally causes to fall. This is a curious

phenomenon; one tree alone is disturbed among a number of others. I have seen this happen in a wood. A tree surrounded with others will suddenly show its branches to be moving, this being caused by a breeze which affects this one only, while those around are still. Acorns, leaves, and large drops of water fall as single trees are moved by this local wind. Rabbits stand up and listen, and some run to their holes. One bolts full speed along the lake-side, seeming to bounce from mound to mound in its wild scamper. The still surface of the water here and there shows ripples as the curious local wind passes over it. This is a very fine lake from a bird-lover's point of view; throughout the year there are always interesting phases of bird life here, however bare the woods or fields may be. Although within nine miles of London, we have had ospreys here. Not very many years ago a pair of these extremely rare birds visited this lake and stayed for a period of three weeks. Many a rare bird now often stays to feed here, but soon passes on. There is only one thing which takes away much of the charm of such a spot, and that is the roar of London, which is nearly always heard.

I leave the lake and go among the bracken in the wood. The September sun, in the sheltered path-way, beats down with scorching heat, making last year's dead oak leaves, which strew the ground,

crackle as the hot rays cause them to contract. Falling acorns, as they come down, sink deep among these dry leaves. Being hidden, they have a chance of germinating, for they may escape the notice of pigeons or squirrels. Everywhere all is still, like a day in early spring; but trees, tinged here and there with touches of pale yellow, show us that the time of the going of the swallows is at hand. A small copper butterfly, glad to have shelter and heat, flits merrily between the avenues of tall bracken, and is lost among the trees. Jays are screeching loudly in trees near where I sit; one, which approached closely and then gave out his harsh note, was even startlingly interesting. In the meadow beyond the hedge a male pheasant is proudly going about, followed by two hens, little thinking that he has not much longer to wander in this attractive wood; for the first of October is drawing near.

COAL-TIT. SMELLING!

A large nest of ants is close at hand; the busy

little people are hurrying backwards and forwards, those going towards the nest have burdens, such as small flies, beetles, pieces of larger flies, etc. One is carrying another ant; the prisoner struggles, but is held fast, and others follow with more captives. These have been out to wage war against another colony and are returning victorious. Wasps are hovering over the victors, and now and then pounce on one and carry it off to feed the young larvæ in their own nest. Another butterfly dances, as it were, along the bracken-fringed path, and flutters over the hedge. Woodpeckers are calling all around; for this wood is a favourite retreat, and the lesser spotted species is increasing here. Two kinds of dragon-flies are darting up and down the path, ever and anon settling on the stems or leaves of young oak trees—they seem to prefer these for some reason. They watch all passing insects from their coign of vantage, and then dart at one, pick it up, and return to another halting-place. A hornet with a deep hum also hovers near me, watching its prey, but the next moment goes beyond the wood. Up a bracken stalk a yellow underwing moth slowly crawls; I only just touch the fern and it drops down and feigns death for nearly half an hour; then it rises, and settles high up on an oak branch.

There is a curious noise behind me—*ceuff ceuff*, and on turning round I see two inquisitive-looking

little eyes peering through the oak leaves. *Ceuff, ceuff*, and the squirrel jumps on to a thicker branch near and "whisks" his tail violently from side to side. He "barks" again, and jumps up about two feet, and alights in the same place, twists his little head, and jumps once more in playful ardour, and approaches still nearer. He evidently cannot quite make out what the strange big creature among the bracken is, for I keep perfectly motionless. Now he looks at me, runs back a few paces and returns, still calling and moving his tail. But he has no more time to waste in looking at any intruder, for he is collecting winter stores. An acorn is picked, and sitting up, he arranges it in his mouth with his front feet, and then runs along and jumps like a puff of air from branch to tree; and then taking an extra long jump he lands with a crash in a holly bush below, but emerges safely on the other side, deposits his acorn in his store place,

BLUE-TIT. TASTING!

and returns for another; still he cannot quite comprehend the big stranger, and thus stops to look in my direction every few minutes.

Before the dews of morning are dried from the grasses, evening mists float slowly down, and again begin to condense on them. During these silent days of autumn the grass is never dry, and mist follows mist in quick succession, floating away with the sun, and falling again when evening comes on. And so the pageant of autumn slowly passes; but each evening mist, and every falling leaf, tells us that a great change is near; we cannot now think of the end, however, for the bracken is still green, the tall elms are not yet tinted with yellow, and overhead skims a swallow. While he flies the days are fair; and as he circles over the low mists, it hardly seems as if summer can really be gone. But day by day the birches become a deeper brown; and the elms, which stand so high, change from green to pale yellow. At length the day comes when swallows, which skimmed so swiftly over the silvery ripples on the lake, are seen no more, and we know that the end of autumn's best show is near. Just before that time, when this season seems suddenly to change into winter, there come several days of sunshine—calm, warm, cloudless days, with a pale blue sky, nearly white on the horizon, and with skylarks singing sweetly over the green meadows.

HAUNT OF THE WILD DUCK

I am on a small hill looking down upon a piece of woodland growing on a gently sloping ridge. From the lowest bush near the brook to the highest tree on the hill, where the branches seem to touch the dome of blue, there is a soft blending of colours, which in their autumn charm outrival all other scenes in this pageant. It seems to be too fascinating to look away from, yet it is almost impossible to single out any one tree. If we gaze at one only, another near clothed in a paler tint of falling foliage attracts the eye, and looking at that, another rival colour takes our attention. There are not two trees alike in this whole sheet of woodland, and all is so calm and so suggestive of the handiwork of the great Creator, that we may well become lost in admiration. Small flocks of rooks fly over the wood, and now and then a bolt of blue flies from one oak to another; pigeons are now filling their crops with acorns; and jays in twos and threes are on the ground nearer me. One comes quite close, and as it swallows an acorn its throat is seen swelling as the large seeds are picked up. Rabbits bolting in the bracken make some noise, for now the tall ferns are drying and their beauty is fading. These clear, still days leave nights of frost, and this does most to destroy the glory of autumn. The leaves drop before their fullest beauty is reached, and the weight of the condensed mists may strip trees in one night. Then

from the north comes a cutting cold wind, and in a few days autumn, as far as its beauty is concerned, is gone and the months of winter are come.

The pageant has gone; it has passed "as a tale that is told." In the beauty of the chestnut foliage we saw the seasons reflected. Their tints seemed to include all the colours of the year; but they too have faded away and now are dead. We watched them as they fell—when the leaves parted from the branches, weighted down with the cold, heavy dew of evening, they floated a moment, as if reluctantly leaving their hold, then fell in a tumbling to the ground and added to the decaying slush beneath. There is sadness in dying autumn such as we all must see. The happy seasons now are mouldering to decay; the hours we spent with Nature are now but sunny memories, which are not to be forgotten because their glories are now waning.

I look upon the empty wood from underneath an old beech; there is shelter here from the wild north wind, and the heavy clouds above look threatening. Here and there a dead leaf, which has clung to the branches, falls swiftly; and one or two snow-flakes, driven by the wind on to the tree-trunks, show spots of white. There is now hardly a sound of bird life. But hark! A loud clear song is uttered, repeated once again, and then only the moaning of the winter wind is heard. The wren's notes send my thoughts

back like a flash to that old ivy-covered post near the pathway in the wood. Once more, like a panoramic scene, the pageant seems again to pass. I seem to see snowdrops nodding on the ground, and the celandine and primroses blooming among their springtide surroundings. Violets flower and fade, and the cry of the cuckoo and songs of warblers are heard. Doves are cooing to their mates, and swallows are twittering over blossom-covered trees. Children in the meadows are making ringlets of buttercups, and skylarks sing overhead. I look upon the wild roses of summer and then upon fields of standing corn ripening in the August sun; the woods again have a touch of autumn's painting, and I seem again to be walking through the avenues of bracken. But alas! A robin near suddenly breaks this reverie with a plaintive little song, and I see that the seasons I love so much have gone. The open space in front is now becoming whiter every minute, and the broken-down stalks of bracken will soon be hidden by snow. Then right onward, with resistless power, the forces of Old Winter seem to hold the land, inclosing it in icy fetters, which means death to so much in the animal and vegetable world. At length the time will come when once again the "wind-flower" will bloom, and the primrose flower and all living creatures will once more hail the beginning again of the Pageant of the Seasons with delight and song.

VI

The Wooing of Birds

WINTER has given place to spring, and it is one of those warm, sunny days which enliven the opening of the freshest season of the year. Long, dark shadows are cast by trees and hedgerows, for the morning sun is not far above the horizon. I am in a small wood; through the trees is seen a lake, and now and then a stretch of brightest silver attracts the eye as a fish or a moorhen ruffles the surface, the sun making the ripples like so many tiny mirrors. On all sides birds are singing, the loudest and most persistent song coming from a little brown singer perched on a fence. The wren always gives out his song from a prominent place, as if he was an important citizen of birdland, and then he dives into the thick bushes, as if he had done something of which he repented.

The woodside trees are showing a tinge of red, which gives promise of the general resurrection which is about to take place. Some snowdrops have broken through the leafy carpet, and as their white heads

bend to the passing breeze, they seem to be forerunners of the myriads of flowers which, in a few weeks, will make this wood a paradise of spring.

From a group of beeches comes the *coo-coo* of a wood-pigeon, and stealthily going in that direction I see one of the prettiest birdland scenes imaginable—a ring-dove wooing his mate. There are several pigeons, but the centre of attraction is a young male, who is showing himself off to advantage to each of the hens in turn. First he approaches one which probably has already mated, for, after bowing and *cooing* round her, he receives a well-merited sharp peck, which damps his ardour, but only for a moment, for he next flies to another hen, which receives him in the same way, and not being desirous of any such attention or nonsense, she too flies away, her rightful mate following.

Then the persevering lover sees a probable mate in a pigeon which is preening its feathers in a tree near which I am in hiding. He flies to this tree and watches for a few moments, then growing bolder, approaches by short stages, until he is on a branch quite close; but still the hen does not deign to notice the intruder. By puffing out his feathers, bowing and *cooing* amorously, he endeavours to attract attention, while the other is smoothing out the feathers of a wing. The coy hen then lifts her head and gives this ardent lover a gentle peck, which has the effect

of increasing his attentions by inspiring hope. He becomes more and more excited; he hops to the branch on which the, as yet, unresponsive one is sitting, and gradually works towards her, *cooing* as he goes. After about five minutes of this behaviour the hen condescends to answer the pretty things he is evidently saying. *Coo-coo*, *coo*, *coo-coo-coo*, she says, and this recognition has a marvellous effect on the male. Probably it corresponds to the human "I like you just a little bit," for he *coos* and bows, his feathers are puffed out as far as he possibly can puff them, his wings are drooping and vibrating with excitement, and his tail is raised and lowered in time with the bows. Then, *cooing* again, the hen rubs her beak on the other's wings, and he answers by doing the same, for he has now wooed and won his mate. Another pigeon, with loud flapping, flies to the tree, and the pair fly away to the fir plantation, perhaps two of the happiest inhabitants of birdland.

It is still springtime. We are on a railway embankment. The fresh green grass is dotted in patches with yellow flowers — coltsfoot and the lesser celandine. A perfume pervades the evening air, and on parting the thick grass we see many scented violets of the white and blue varieties. Tree-pipits are rising a short distance and descending with outspread wings, singing sweetly. We hear the short snatchy songs of whinchats

which finish with the curious whistle *thu-tick, thu-tick-tick*. These sprightly, engaging little birds, although they appear as if fighting, do not do each other any damage. Evening is the best time to watch the males at their wooing. Two cocks chase each other round the bushes and along the embankment; sometimes one is the pursuer, then again the other. The hen follows, and as they settle she settles. They seem never to come to blows, or rather pecks, so that it would puzzle one to say how they decide their harmless duel. Perhaps the hen whinchat chooses the best-looking of the rivals, as is the case with some of our gayest birds. Right on until it is nearly dark, is this chasing about kept up without an observer seeing any actual gain on either side. However, the next morning the pair are mated, and then no sign of any rival lover is seen.

The willow-wren, one of our first spring migrants to arrive, and one of the sleekest and smallest of our warblers, is a desperate little fighter when a hen has to be wooed. When the orchards are tinted pink with blossom, and the air is rich with the perfume of wild flowers, the male willow-wrens fight for the females. The hen always looks on at such a contest, and when one suitor is vanquished she helps the victor to drive him away, doing her utmost to give one good peck if possible. At the height of the contest many

WHINCHAT

petals are knocked down. When the fight is finished we may see a pretty little love scene. The male keeps near the hen and utters his undulating song, his love-talk, in varying pitches. Sometimes he seems so exhilarated that he cannot repeat his song in a pitch high enough to satisfy his feelings. He will occasionally break off in his song to pick up an insect. Then, however, comes the prettiest scene of all. He offers this to the little bird he has wooed as a love-gift, and she tenderly accepts it, while the other utters his song in the fullest pitch possible.

Within a few days they will commence nest-building, and this is always a pleasing sight. The position is first chosen, then the hen collects a few grasses and commences. The male, who is singing in the tree above, will now help. He brings the grasses and gives them to his little wife. This goes on for a day or two, and when the home is finished, and the eggs are laid, the delight of the male is beyond all bounds. He sings the whole day through for very joy. Let us now leave this happy scene and again go back to the fields.

Partridges are calling, and larks, pipits, and wrens are singing. A few rooks lazily fly from field to field, and lapwings are playing over the meadows. Let us hide in a hedgerow, for it is these birds which we wish to watch. It is the end of March, and now the birds named should be mating. A few settle about

seventy yards away; some are already mated, as can be seen by the pairs keeping together. There are a few, however, which have not yet obtained mates, and these are the most interesting. The slightly brighter-coloured males are showing themselves off to the females. Advancing by short runs, they lower their heads, again running forwards, then retreating, while some rise in the air, and with a rushing noise made by their wings—something like the "drumming" of a snipe—descend to the ground and recommence their wooing. All the time their love-calls are given, which, instead of being like the ordinary call, *pee-e-wit*, more resembles *pi-wife*, varied with some other calls, *pe-e-e*. When the tall trees are casting their long shadows over the land, and the evening star is dimly seen in the pale sky, the birds go off in pairs; for while we have been watching their antics and evolutions they have chosen their mates, and will in a day or two begin the construction of their slight grass nests.

We began by watching the pigeons in the wood in the early morning, and we will finish also with the woods. The great red orb of the sun is slowly sinking beyond the trees; everything is still, and a silent peace seems to hover over the whole landscape. Wheresoever we look we see the green tints of returning spring. The air is filled with the glad songs of numberless feathered singers; every corner

of the wood has its music or love-talk of the birds. As evening shades deepen, one by one of these leave off and enter the bushes below. When all have ceased and the pigeons have finished their soft cooing, and when the darker sky is sprinkled with dots of twinkling gold, we hear a few hurried notes from a nightingale—then silence settles over all.

Presently, however, his loud notes ring out with their deep passion and fascinating charm. The male birds arrive about April 19th, and a week later the hens also come. The bird in the silver birch is singing sweeter far than he has sung on previous nights, for he well knows that it is by his song he will win his mate. Not very far away is another nightingale—he is singing against his rival—but the one near is far and away the champion songster of these woods. When darkness comes on he stops singing; there is a slight rustling in the bushes beneath, and he drops to these and enters the cover. *Kurr-kurr*, we hear, muttered in a muffled tone; *pui-pui* is the answer. The hen again calls *kurr-kurr*, and the male in reply sings a few notes, but uttered in so low a tone that they can barely be heard. This is his love-talk, and the hen nightingale answers the pretty things he is saying by repeatedly calling *kurr-kurr*. Because of the darkness we lose much of this love scene. For half an hour or more they hop silently about the bushes, and then the male

again flies to his favourite branch on the birch, and pours out such a flood of passionate and loving music that we know he has won his mate—won her by music, and such music that if only a human voice could match it the singer would attract the world; yet here, in this lonely woodland corner I am often his only human listener.

VII

Chaffinch Lane

PINK, pink. At the entrance to Chaffinch Lane I am greeted with these full, musical notes. *Pink, pink,* again ; then a short and, as it were, sharp song, seemingly given forth in anger. Looking into the bushes a chaffinch is seen sitting on a spray of may blossom ; and lower down, among the brambles, there is his nest, his mate also being near. Walking on a little farther I let the two birds go on with their work of building, meanwhile watching them in their labours. While the hen sits in her nest, the other keeps taking pieces of newspaper, which are torn off a larger piece near the road, and with these he decorates the nest, this material being varied with pieces of moss or horsehair, which are pulled from the sides of trees, or from other places against which horses have rubbed. The characteristic note, *pink, pink,* is still repeated, and if one goes too near the now almost finished nest the call becomes louder, and raising his head he shows a bluish crest, and then hops about excitedly, as if repelling an enemy.

How he does try to scold in a most effective way! and as I walk away along the lane he follows, and when I am some distance down I still hear his now merry song, always beginning with the loud note *pink, pink*. There always seems to me to be very much of expression and meaning in the chaffinch's call-notes.

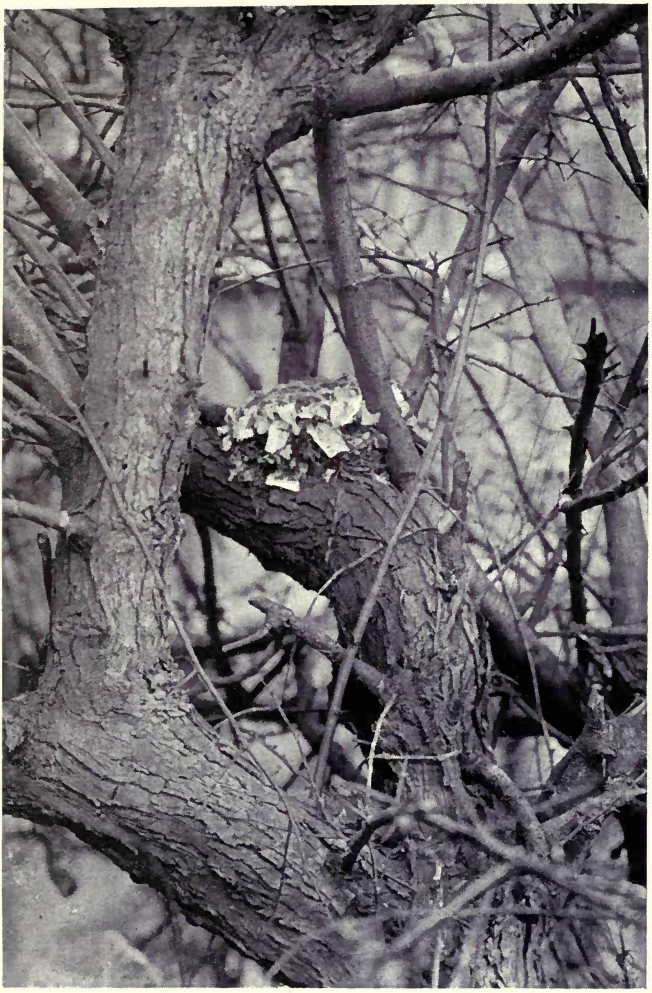
CHAFFINCH'S NEST
DECORATED WITH NEWSPAPER

I like to recognise this wild, gently sloping hill as Chaffinch Lane. That is not its proper name; I believe it has had several names successively, all being less worthy of its charms. On a tree at its entrance is a time-worn notice board,

which is now falling to pieces, the legal warning being only just decipherable, "Trespassers will be prosecuted." An effective old notice this, and one that has no doubt frightened many a harmless wanderer. To persons who have roamed about the country as I have done, such a warning has no terror, for if they behave well by doing no danger to crops or fences trespassers cannot be prosecuted; in point of fact, I believe the law of England permits us to go where we please, providing we do no damage. I knew this as a boy, and several keepers found it out to their very excusable surprise, and many an interesting birdland scene would have had its attractions unrecorded if I had not occasionally entered a private wood, or crawled underneath a hedge, in order to reach a meadow or lake beyond.

The notice board is old, and is now partially hidden by brambles, and no one takes the trouble to look at the warning, and if they did happen to see it they would pass on, because a right-of-way has been for long established. Thus Chaffinch Lane is one of the most wild, and, until lately, one of the most unfrequented lanes in this charming suburb of North London.

From no one spot is it possible to see many yards away. The short turns, hidden by high hawthorn bushes, overgrown with brambles, effectually cut off the view on either side. As I wander on alone, the



CHAFFINCH'S NEST, DECORATED WITH PAPER

sensation is that of being cut off from the outside world, and noise and bustle of crowded town life which is still near, the hum of which seems to make itself heard beyond. This lane contains a little world of wonders, yet this is only a corner of our sweet, still unrivalled countryside. Although within a few minutes' walk of a large county town it is a retreat of superabundant bird life, and rich in Nature's gifts.

I have always loved my Chaffinch Lane. It is in no way disappointing, the name is in accordance with the characteristics of the place. There was once a Nightingale Lane in which a famous speaker and writer lived in a pretty villa; but instead of being called after our chief of songsters, the prestige of the lane all came from a public-house—"The Nightingale"! That was about enough to ruffle a genuine nightingale's feathers; but such are the anomalies of wild Nature in the suburbs. Its native wildness has always charmed me, and the more I see of this the more I am charmed, notwithstanding that many of its old time characteristics are now no more to be seen. In these days of "improvement" it seems to be thought necessary even to destroy the sylvan retreats and surroundings of a suburban town in the endeavour to make all appear more modern or London-like. Give me the old lanes and the old ways, however; there seems to be a breath of the good old times in a few, but a fast diminishing

number, of our walks within the twelve-mile radius. Chaffinch Lane was once, not so very long ago, a mere waggon track, little frequented. Such a lane which then led to the farm land, if left, as many were, to run wild, formed a retreat of great attraction for all kinds of birds. If a road is actually closed to all traffic, birds seem reluctant to make it their abode; but if only a few people walk these daily, or if the road is used for farm traffic, the birds are sure to be found in greater numbers; for most of our suburban birds like the company of man.

This old roadway, now a footpath, which really leads to nowhere, is overgrown with bushes, and these abound with bird life. During the days of early spring I often wander down Chaffinch Lane, for it is here that we can nearly always reckon on catching a first glimpse of the whitethroat creeping about the lower herbage; and here, too, we may often see the gay-plumaged redstart flittering on before us, for many migratory birds come here and remain for a time on their first arrival for the season in the country. The lesser whitethroat, which may be readily recognised by his breast tinged with pink, is seen and heard here earlier than elsewhere. The lesser whitethroat when it first arrives has a beautiful pale pink tinge on its breast feathers, but before many weeks have elapsed this disappears, the chief cause being the black state of many hedges; the birds

searching amongst the thickest parts rub their feathers against the branches, and the pinkiness becomes tainted and dull.

CHAFFINCH'S NEST

As I walk down the lane birds fly out of the bushes. A cock blackbird standing in the lane seems surprised to see an intruder. With head erect, and moving his tail up and down, he watches for a few moments, then darts onward between the many

covered bushes, giving out his loud chattering cry. Another, startled by his notes, dashes out of a bush, twists and turns over the flowers, goes over the hedge, and flies across the meadow beyond; and then looking in the bush from whence he came I see a nest containing five green eggs. It is impossible to see through the dense thickets on each side of Chaffinch Lane. During the winter months it is no easy matter to see through the thickly branched bushes; but now, covered with young green leaves as they are, and the fading hawthorn blossom filling up other spaces, it is well-nigh an impossibility for the eye to penetrate the mass.

A *piping* comes from a flower-covered bush, and a male bullfinch, resplendent in his spring plumage, is seen, and no doubt he has a nest commenced in the thick bramble beyond. The cuckoo has been calling in this lane for some weeks past, and as I ramble on, listening to the songs of warblers, one and then another flies out of the bushes. I think the hen cuckoo often watches the smaller birds while building, for I have often seen them fly from the same spot near a nest before their egg has been placed therein.

Chaffinch Lane widens here; the greensward is almost bare of bushes, and among green grass blades, daisies, and other flowers, a little spring of clear cold water rises. Very slowly it trickles out, but still

spreads amongst the herbage, forming tiny rivulets running in zigzag fashion in and out between the grass roots; and in parts little pools are formed, the water being of crystal purity, so that a flower on the edge is reflected as in a glass. A few yards farther down this miniature stream leaves the green, and trickles in many smaller courses across and down the old roadway; then finally it reaches the grass on the other side, and is lost sight of among the bushes. Farther still down the lane we hear it drip, drip, dripping underneath the thickest parts of the bushes, and here this dripping sound is mingled with the blackcap's wild song, given out loud and distinct. Soon a shaking branch tells where the bird is sitting. Looking back up the lane I see a blackbird standing

YOUNG CHAFFINCH

near the little pools. A chaffinch joins him, splashing in the water; then, after fluttering on a bending branch and drying his feathers he drops to the ground again, calls *pink, pink*, picks up a small piece of moss, and away he goes up the lane between the green bushes, the happiest and busiest creature in Chaffinch Lane.

It always takes a lover of Nature a long time to walk from end to end of Chaffinch Lane. Every step something fresh attracts notice; in nearly every bush and tree I see something that reminds me of happy days gone by, for I have known and loved this lane all my life, and scenes which remind us of younger days are always fascinating in their interest.

When at last I reach the old bridge that spans the brook at the end of the lane I halt for rest, for it is here that much more of Nature is to be seen. The stream is flowing slowly, and near the hedge a trickle of water attracts attention; it is the water from the spring higher up the hill that has found its way underneath the thick dark bushes to the larger stream. Just round the curve a long row of old pollard willows stand like so many sentinels along the stream-side. The marsh-tit breeds in these, boring its own hole through the solid wood. It has always been a mystery to me how a bird with such a tiny beak can make a hole in wood that it is difficult to cut with a sharp knife; but the marsh-tit

does this, and a cosy nesting-hole he makes too, lined with the willow-catkins and fine mosses and hair.

This lane, which is thus overflowing with life, seems to be different from the more distant country roadways. There are more birds here, because owing to the buildings and new roads which are springing up all around, they are compelled either to leave their old haunts altogether, or move to the few available nesting sites near. Nearly all birds have a great affection for their old haunts, and it needs much of inconvenience to make them leave their quarters. Chaffinch Lane is becoming a harbour of refuge for dozens of warblers, finches, thrushes, titmice, and other common but much-loved denizens of the countryside. I try to find out why this lane shows such a marked difference to distant haunts of a similar kind. At first the cause is difficult to detect; but when evening comes on; when birds one by one cease their love-songs, and their happy chatterings become less; when the sun, which sinks like a ball of molten crimson beyond the undulating meadows, has gone, we find out why this is. Far out in the larger counties there always seems to be harmony in the air, which can only be described as the music of summer. This is unnoticed by the majority of people, yet the sound is there. So soft is this undertone in the evening air, that the hum of the countless gnats as they play round

the bushes, drowns it. I have heard this summer music on a Surrey common, in the Hertfordshire lanes, and on the Dorset hills; and it seems to make the country more beautiful, coming like the voice of Nature herself. But here in this secluded suburban lane the cessation of the birds' songs only causes the rumbling and distant roar of the greatest city on earth to be more apparent. So distinctly have I known this unwelcome muffled roar to be, that it has prevented

ROBIN'S NEST

me from hearing a nightingale's song, for there is a nightingale in Chaffinch Lane. As I return up the winding road this hum and roar takes away some of the silent charm which one would like to meet with.

A few days more of spring sunshine have passed, and when I once more make my way to my favourite haunt I expect to see my chaffinch sitting on a clutch of eggs. I hear the merry *pink, pink,* and on feeling in the nest I find there are three eggs. When I return from a ramble down the lane I notice the chaffinch's notes are given with a touch of sadness, and going to the nest I find all the eggs are gone! As the nest is warm I can tell the eggs have only just been taken, probably by a robber bird. I did not want these birds, which always greeted me when I passed them, to desert their chosen home, so I now pick up two small stones, about the size and shape of a chaffinch's egg, and place these in the nest, hoping that the birds will think these are their eggs, and so lay more to make up the full number.

I had occasion to pass this nest three weeks later, and my delight was great to see the hen still sitting. My little ruse was a success, then? But on rousing the bird off her nest, to my surprise and disappointment I found she had been sitting all this time, but only on the two stones!

IN THE RAVEN'S HAUNT

VIII

An Outlaw of the Air

THE grey dawn of morning was giving place to the fuller light of sunrise when I first looked upon the raven's haunt. Over the wild and rugged hills, clouds tinged with roseate hue were travelling fast. As the cold greyness disappeared, the clouds turned into deeper crimson and glimpses of green sky could be seen between the wind-torn rolls of vapour, and then like a golden flood the sunbeams burst out between two giant hills, while a missel-thrush heralded the light with his cheerful song.

A twite on the higher branches of a tree called out his notes, then flitted on towards the rising sun. This, as it slowly rose higher, showed with distinctness a ridge of pines, black against the now increasing light, and farther off, between the nearer hills, I saw the haunt of that now rare bird—the raven.

We were stranded at a little country station, but happily this boasted of a waiting-room and a fire. After a time a sleepy porter came on the scenes to give us some light. At last our train did pull up to take us one stage nearer to our goal. For one day and night we stayed in a riverside village and explored the beautiful and wild country, but our thoughts were on the far-away distant ridge of hills, which were seen, almost hidden by a veil of mist. As we wandered by the dipper stream, rippling and bubbling on its way over moss-covered boulders and smaller stones, we looked forward to the parts where the current was not so wide, and where it flowed more rapidly between the higher hills. Here, however, its beauty was most enchanting, and when the pink hue of evening's sunset touched the hills and water alike, turning the latter's sparkling ripples into gleams like tinted jewels, I seemed to be in a new world, even the sounds of the country, as well as the scenes, being new to me. I can now picture again in my mind the hundreds of fields, the fantastic

shapes of dividing hedges, and the many different tints on near and more distant hills—rusty red where the dead bracken lay, and deep green near the

A HILLSIDE STREAM

streams, and white cottages with cattle grazing near, while the homeward-bound shepherd was seen with his dogs. Little things in themselves, yet the whole sufficing to make up a picture of rural beauty not to be forgotten.

Not a great many years ago ravens used to breed in our inland counties. The tree still stands in which the last pair bred in Middlesex. Still these birds are not altogether confined to the wildest parts of our coasts, for in one or two well-protected inland spots they still build and lay. It was in one of these inland breeding haunts that I saw and studied the habits of these outlaws of the air. I call them outlaws because they have been driven from most of our English counties by powder and shot, through an erroneous idea that our raven kills and takes lambs and other small animals. In this respect, however, the raven is not such a confirmed robber as the carrion crow. In counties in which I found the former breeding, there were extensive sheep farms. I have it on the authority of shepherds and keepers that the raven seldom, if ever, touched the live lambs, while the carrion crow was a much worse offender, for he was often seen threatening or attacking them. Civilisation has also had much to do with driving the raven from England.

At last we reached the hills, and I cannot describe their wild grandeur. Over one great rock six buzzards

were soaring in wonderful circles, soon to be out of sight in the blue of heaven. We met the keeper at the appointed spot, left our luggage at the little road-side inn, and we were soon on our way to search for the raven, the first of five memorable days which were spent in this mountainous district.

Ravens always place their nests in such a position that the morning sun shines upon them, and thus it is generally useless to search among rocks which do not face east or south-east. After a walk of about two miles, we saw a pair of ravens circling over their haunt, and a nest was found apparently not yet ready for eggs. This we afterwards discovered was a dummy, and never meant to contain eggs. The raven, I believe, always makes two nests, and if any intruder approaches, the birds are often seen settling near or flying over the unused one. Time after time we saw a raven sitting on a rock immediately over a dummy nest, his black form outlined in sharp profile against the sky. At last we discovered his little ruse, and found that all the time the hen was sitting on one egg in a genuine nest near by. This was well concealed, and there was every probability of the one egg being hatched. We did not discover it until the day before leaving.

We toiled over hills and through valleys, explored many gorges and dingles on that first day, until about one o'clock we saw one of the great birds

leave a rock, and immediately afterwards the hen followed from a dingle between two of the smaller hills. The raven's home is a home of mountains, rivers, and waterfalls. In the steep but narrow gorges between the hills, where the rocks are ivy-covered and water rushes in torrents far below, we find the raven's nest. It was in such a dingle that we found this one, for after a short search it was seen about halfway up the ivy-covered rock-side. Although such a large structure it was skilfully concealed, and from a short distance harmonised with the surroundings. The beauty of the site was beyond

RAVEN'S NEST

description—indeed, if we follow the raven to his haunt we come upon the most wild and rugged scenery that our British Islands can boast of. This nest did not appear to be difficult of access, but when we attempted to climb, we found it impossible to reach the place without ropes. The nest contained two eggs, which could be seen from above, and by waiting four days we hoped the bird would lay the full clutch. On our way home a thick mist descended, and we arrived at our inn wet through and hungry, but well satisfied with our first day's work in the raven's haunt.

This nest was discovered on March 14th. We returned to photograph it on the 17th, and were somewhat surprised to find that still it contained only two eggs, and that the hen was sitting on them. After a short rest we prepared for the descent, but found to our dismay that the crowbar to hold the ropes could not be driven into the hard rock, there being only a few inches of soil, and not enough to secure any hold. Almost over the nest there was a fair-sized ledge, and we climbed down to this and endeavoured to drive the crowbar in here, but over the rock there was only a thick layer of moss, and this also gave no hold. We were beginning to think that a photograph could not be taken, but I was determined if it was possible it should be done. A little to the left and above the nest there was a small tree growing in

the side of the cliff. This hardly looked strong enough to stand much strain, but my friend Mr. J. A. Walpole Bond climbed down to this, and took the ropes with him and fastened both to the small trunk. The keeper and I then went to the bottom of the dingle, where the rushing waterfall's never-ceasing roar drowned every other sound. Both of us then hung on to the rope, and finding that it bore our combined weight, I had no hesitation in preparing for the ascent. I strapped my camera and tripod to my back, and when all was ready I was hauled up for fifty feet. The difficulties of manipulating a camera when hanging in space are extremely great—one really needs about six hands. After a deal of manœuvring I could not manage to get the tripod legs in position, owing to there being no crevices or jutting pieces of rock within reach, and so I had to use the apparatus as a hand-camera; but even then it took me nearly an hour to focus and take a series of six pictures. However, at length the hard task was done, and I descended with my camera and photographs, which I have every reason to believe are the first pictures of a raven's nest with its contents photographed *in situ* that have ever been taken. Such nests have been photographed before, or rather their sites, but I have never seen a picture showing the eggs.

The second nest was found on March 15th. This

THE AUTHOR AT THE RAVEN'S NEST

was not ready for eggs, but I secured a picture of the site. Before I succeeded in this my camera had a narrow escape of being smashed to atoms. To reach the nest we had to climb up a steep, loose, slate cliff, and I placed my camera, as I thought securely, a short distance below the nest. It was packed with the lenses in a limp canvas case. I was just preparing to set up the apparatus when I had the horror of seeing the case bounding full-speed down the side of the hill! Over and over it rolled, jumping the larger stones, ever getting nearer and nearer to the steep precipice sixty feet farther down. The scene only lasted a few seconds, but it seemed long to me sitting helpless above. At last, with one big bound, it disappeared over the edge and was lost to view. There was a drop here of forty feet, and after this a long, slanting fall of three hundred feet or more into the rushing river below, the roar of which could be heard. I waited to hear the smashing fall which I felt certain must be heard, but still thought that it seemed to be long in coming. Was it already on its way to the river, or could it possibly have lodged at the foot of the steep fall of rock? Mr. Bond, who followed the camera as quickly as anyone ever yet went down such a steep piece of cliff, reached the edge soon after the bag disappeared, and then shouted the welcome news that it was safe. By a most miraculous piece of luck there happened

to be a small bush a few feet down the cliff, and on two small branches of this my precious camera had caught. He soon hauled it up, and I began to unpack, still expecting to find the whole apparatus reduced to matchwood; but it felt solid from the outside. The straps were quickly undone and the camera pulled out, and, strange to say, it had survived this journey — one bent screw and a slight crack being all the damage done. Then, however, I feared for the two lenses, and hardly dared to open the silk handkerchief containing them; but these, too, were safe, including my much-valued

RAVEN'S NEST

Goërz lens. It speaks well for the maker of the camera, for I am certain no other ever had such a long and rough journey to arrive at the end safe and sound. A few inches farther to the right or left, or if it had only made a bigger bound when it passed out of our view, it would have meant certain destruction, and the pictures illustrating this chapter could not have been taken. My camera has had some remarkable escapes in its time, but its preservation on this occasion surpasses all its other wild adventures.

During the five days which I spent in the ravens' haunt I had good opportunities of seeing many pairs of birds; in a radius of thirty miles we found four nests containing eggs. One of these meant a stiff climb, but the others were not difficult to reach, although to get to these we had to climb three hundred feet or thereabouts on treacherous, slaty cliffs, where a false step, or a slip in places, would mean almost certain death. We were half-way up one hillside when a raven left her nest and circled round above, joined by her mate, the latter for some reason being very angry. He gave vent to his feelings on a flock of jackdaws which rose near. He picked one bird out of the flock, chased it, twisting and turning in his flight, and almost succeeded in striking it. Being foiled, he made one or two grand, rushing swoops, and then turned at right angles and swept down like a bullet on another terrified jackdaw;

AUTHOR DESCENDING A LOOSE SLATE CLIFF

but with wonderful powers of flight for a jackdaw this one also eluded his pursuer. Not until the whole flock of intruders had been driven from his well-guarded haunt did the raven rest; then, floating along with outspread pinions, he soared round and about his nest, every now and then "tumbling"—a curious habit he has. While going along slowly he falls on his back in the air, drops a few feet, then recovers himself and soars again.

When ravens have young the male will almost attack any intruder who goes too near the nest, whether it be man or bird. A keeper I know, who lives near the ravens' haunt, was once sitting near to a nest containing a brood. One of the old birds was flying about the steep dingle or gorge on the hillside, "barking" defiance, and trying to guard his young. A too venturesome kestrel, which, I believe, had a nest in the same dingle, began flying round the larger bird. This so angered the raven that he attacked the kestrel without more ado. The latter, with much better powers of flight, simply toyed with his adversary, and for a long time the two soared round and about, the kestrel seeming to enjoy the fun, while the raven, to judge by his angry "barks," was becoming more and more enraged. At last he became more determined, and with one desperate rush caught up to the little brown hawk, and with a deadly blow struck him down. For the last time the

RAVEN'S NEST

kestrel dropped with closed wings, as he had done many a time before when catching his prey, but this time he fell to the banks of the picturesque waterfall at the bottom of the dingle, and when the keeper went down he found that the bird's head was nearly severed from its body. The raven had probably struck his foe with one of his great wings, and to judge by his contented calls as he returned to the nest, this outlaw of the air felt well satisfied with his victory.

The raven's calls and notes are almost a kind of language. Those who have lived among them, and who are observant, are sometimes able to tell whether it is the cock or hen which calls, and their many different notes uttered by either bird can in some measure be understood. When the nest contains young is perhaps the best time to hear the raven's language. If a person then goes too near, some of the bolder birds will threaten to attack them, and in their anger will perch on a tree, and call defiantly, and tear and snap off twigs and small branches, but showing at the same time, to those who can understand a bird's manners and language, anxiety and love for the precious fledgelings.

If a sheep should fall sick and die, or, as is more often the case, should slip down the rocks and get killed, ravens are the first to discover the mishap, and with gluttonous haste they will tear out favourite

morsels from the body. But before touching such food a raven soars round and above the carcase, to see that there is no human enemy lurking in the rocks; for though quick to find food, he is ever on the alert, and never, except in very foggy weather, will he approach within gunshot. The raven is, even for

EGGS OF RAVEN

a bird, an early riser; long before sunrise he "beats" the hills and valleys, and after sunset his harsh call, *cruck-cruck*, may still be heard as he homeward goes to his retreat among the hills.

We found one nest with five eggs, after a long and stiff climb of over a thousand feet. We were certain there was a nest near at hand, but for some

time it could not be discovered. We rested about two-thirds of the way up the precipitous rock and took our lunch. When this was almost finished, we heard the well-known call of the raven, which sounded only about fifty feet above, and although Watkins, the keeper (a thorough naturalist and bird-lover), said it was a cock raven calling far above, I was convinced it was the hen calling from her nest. Another difficult climb, and the nest was discovered, but in a position absolutely impossible to photograph, either with or without the aid of ropes.

The view from the rocks immediately above this nest was stupendous and of marvellous grandeur; it can best be described by one word—solitude—a solitude so complete and impressive that one felt awed. Twelve hundred feet below, the river, winding like a silver thread, made its way over boulders and between rocks. Snowy white waterfalls and smaller mountain streams, as they came down from their heights, were the only sounds—the music of these everlasting hills; and this reached us, as it were, in an undertone—a softly pleasing sound, a contrast to the deafening roar which is heard when near to the boiling torrents. Fit music this, I thought, as I looked over the vast view stretched before me, for the raven to listen to from his citadel. There was a roadway by the river—a faint grey line. The opposite hill was dark, covered on its lower sides

with sheep-walks; and more to the left was a small larch wood. Patches of red showed where the dead bracken still lay, and sprinkled about the hills were here and there tiny white dots—the sheep. Away yonder a small white cottage is almost hidden by a turn in the valley, and from a wood near here we heard every now and then the sound of an axe striking wood. It is strange how the smallest sound will sometimes rise to such a height. With the aid of my glasses I see a woman cutting branches from a tree; then like a speck we see her trudging homewards with her burden. Overhead, buzzards were "mewing," adding to the rare wildness of the scene with their wild cries—a cry so much in harmony with these lonely hills. Skimming with swift and graceful flight along the ridge of the opposite hill, we saw a kite—that rarest of British birds. For as long as it was possible to follow him with our eyes we did so, for even to see a kite is a red-letter day in the lifetime of an ardent naturalist. For a time I sat on a hill, looking out over one of the wildest spots to be found in the British Islands, lost in admiration at the bleak and rugged hills before me, while high up over the valley the two ravens flew, watching our every movement. Sometimes it seemed as though the male was trying to drive his mate back to the nest, for they occasionally had a "set-to" in the air. At length we went on our way, leaving the ravens in

sole possession of their lonely home, and long may they live in these wild hills, unpersecuted by collectors; for the sable forms of these fine birds as they fly from crag to crag are a fitting addition to the charm of their romantic home.

Egg collectors, or agents of dealers in birds' eggs, are now the worst enemies of rare birds. If it were not for such destroyers the fast-diminishing number of our rarer breeding species would, in the course of a few years, naturally increase. I have been told repeatedly—and I have also seen similar assertions in print—that *bonâ-fide* collecting does not do harm to the birds in question. If there was only *one* collector in these small islands, and if that one was content with *one* clutch of eggs only, the above argument would have some little force. But there are hundreds of people who call themselves *bonâ-fide* collectors who are not easily satisfied. I know some who think it necessary to have five or six clutches of eggs of such rare birds as the raven or buzzard, to make their collection of any value. Egg collectors, and these alone, are driving from this country its last remaining specimens of rare birds, whose absence in time will be vainly regretted.

We found one other nest containing three eggs, one of these being broken, also one or two nests not ready for eggs. The five days we spent among the hills will ever be remembered with joy. It is no

child's-play searching for and photographing ravens' nests; it means downright hard work. Walks of twenty to thirty miles a day over the roughest hills, tramps through rivers and bogs, and climbs on some of the most treacherous cliffs, not to mention the heavy apparatus, makes one thoroughly tired out at the end of the day. There is one thing, however, in its favour—the keen, bracing air gives one a most voracious appetite; and after a bath and dinner one feels almost equal to commence another day's tramp.

A STREAM THE DIPPER LOVES

IX

The Dartford Warbler

IN my wanderings over this country while studying bird life, I have seen a great variety of scenery, ranging from wild, treeless hills, to marshy plains, but I think that of all views I ever looked upon the commons of Surrey have been to me the most charming. In a day's walk over some of these large tracts we come across ever-changing scenes. Surrey landscapes are some of the most beautiful in the country, and are teeming with bird life. One of these commons is favoured by the presence of that rare bird the Dartford warbler. My friend Mr. Norman Gilroy found this species breeding there during the early spring of 1902, and I went down with him to photograph the nest on April 26th. He discovered two nests the week before this; one contained one egg, the other was not quite finished.

The day we visited this common was somewhat unfavourable for photography, owing to a strong wind which was blowing. Such a wind is the bird-photographer's chief disadvantage. It is next to

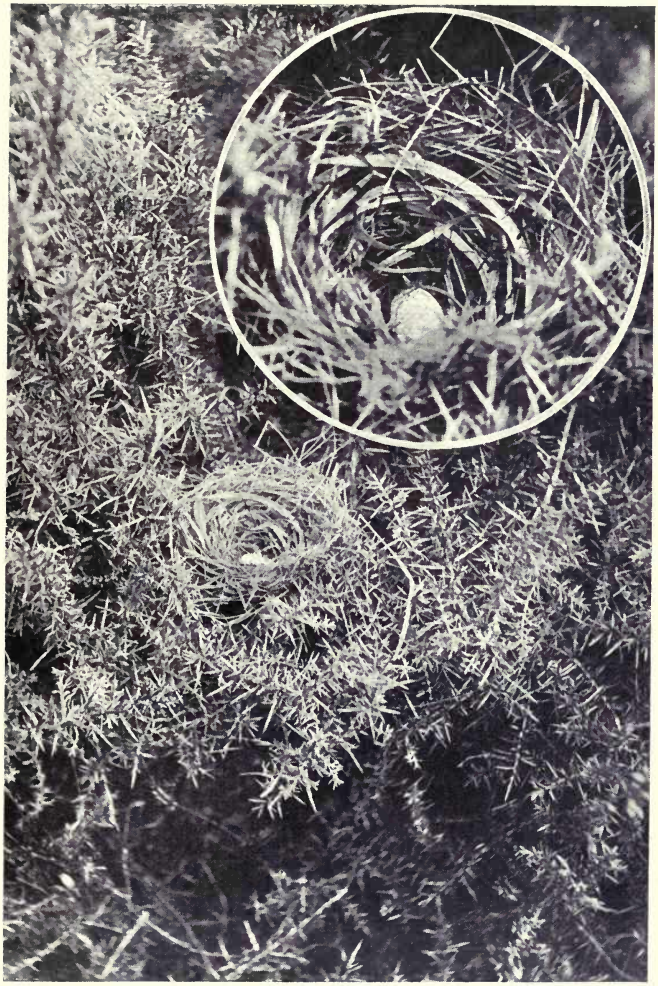
impossible to get a picture of a nest in a bush when this is swaying through gusty blasts.

We had not been on the furze-covered common more than half an hour when we saw a Dartford warbler. This was the hen bird, and she resented our visit to her nesting quarters by calling angrily *tuez, tuez*, every few seconds. This is a pretty note, quite different to any call uttered by any other British warbler. It is much softer than the whitethroat's *chez, chez*, and cannot be confounded with it. We sat down near the nest, and waited for the bird to show herself. Presently she appeared not four yards away, and sat on the top of a low bush for a few seconds, then dropped back to the thick cover, all the time calling and working nearer to us. I caught sight of her several times as she hopped from bush to bush; but she seldom showed herself for long. I think it is always extremely interesting to look for the first time on a bird which is so little known as the Dartford warbler. Our larger, rarer birds are generally well known, or at least their habits are, yet a small warbler, which seldom shows itself, and is at the same time one of our rarest breeding birds, seems to be entirely overlooked by ornithologists. In my opinion, it is the smaller birds which are the most interesting.

We were surprised to find that this nest contained no eggs. When Mr. Gilroy found it seven days

before, it seemed to be quite ready for incubation purposes. The birds had, however, spent another week on their home; it was almost on the ground in a small clump of young furze, and was skilfully concealed.

The other nest was about thirty minutes' walk from this one, and as we went over the yellow furze-covered heath the wind seemed to increase in force, and I was afraid photography would be impossible. At length we reached the nest in a patch of furze at the top of a hill. On moving the branches aside and looking in, we were greatly disappointed to find it empty. Had some collector been there before us, or had a robber-bird taken the eggs? All doubt, however, was set at rest, for the single egg was found to have dropped through the bottom of the flimsy little structure, but luckily was not broken. This nest was very lightly built and consisted only of a few dried grasses made cup-shaped. I think the bird must have laid the egg before the nest was ready, or the strong winds, which had been prevalent for a week, destroyed the nest to a certain extent, and caused the egg to slip through. However, we placed the egg back in the nest, and tried to photograph it, but with little success. One of us held the furze bush, another held my focussing cloth to keep the wind off, while I waited with pneumatic ball in hand to give the necessary ex-

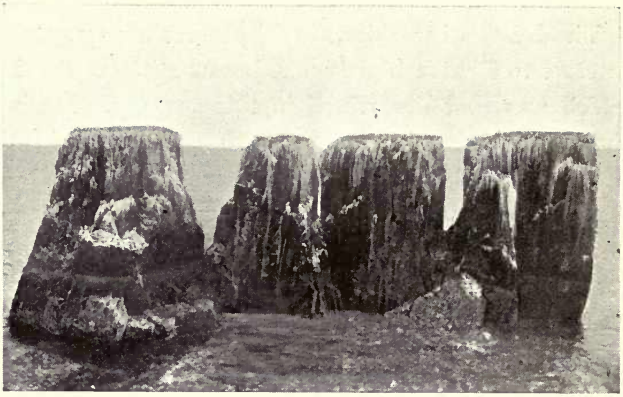


NEST AND EGG OF DARTFORD WARBLER

posure of one second. But any lull in the wind seemed as if it would not come. I believe it increased in force. The light was dull, and consequently I had to use my lens at full aperture, and could not get very good definition, owing to being so close to the nest. I was eventually, after a lengthy wait, able to expose a few plates, two of which are here shown.

After taking these we searched for other nests, but were unsuccessful in finding any. I had, however, a splendid view of a male Dartford warbler. He was perched on the top of a low holly bush, only one or two yards away, and I was delighted to hear his song. This was an extremely pretty example of avian music, lasting only about eight seconds, yet for pureness of tone, equal to any other of our warblers. It is repeated at intervals of about half a minute, sometimes from the same bush, but more often from different stations. The Dartford warbler is seldom seen on the wing, it moves from bush to bush in a skulking way, and does not often show itself. It is very confiding, and does not seem to mind anyone approaching to within two yards. I hope before long to find out more about the habits of this little-known bird. The egg is white, sometimes of a greenish or buffish shade, spotted mostly at the larger end with dark-brown spots, and much resembles those of the whitethroat.

The Dartford warbler should possess a very special interest to British bird lovers, because it is a species which was first discovered in this country. During the spring of 1773 a pair were shot on a heath near Dartford, hence the bird's name. It is a resident in this country throughout the year, and is nowhere of a migratory character. If it was not for severe winters, which we sometimes experience, this warbler would no doubt increase. I know that it still breeds in several of our English counties, but the exact localities must, for obvious reasons, remain a close secret.



THE PINNACLES

X

The Farne Islands and their Birds

IT has been stated that the Farne Islands have been overdone by bird photographers. If we judged by the number who visit these famous isles with cameras, I think this assertion would be correct; but in point of fact only few of the pictures obtained are ever seen by the general public, while the great majority of people do not even know where the attractive little islands are.

If we take a map of England and look on the Northumberland coast, we see several dots close to the shore. On some maps these are marked as

"The Staples," and on others as "Fern Islands"; but Farne Islands is their popular name. The largest of the group is Farne Island itself, and this is about two and a half miles from the mainland. On its eastern side are precipitous black basaltic cliffs between eighty and ninety feet high; the north-west is open to the sea, and a small sandy bay forms a convenient landing-place. The main island is about sixteen acres in area. Along the whole of one side is the lighthouse, with its adjacent buildings. Just above the bay stands a small chapel, supposed to be about seven centuries old; and near this is St. Cuthbert's Tower, built about the year 1500. The small chapel and its immediate surroundings are full of interest; a low wall surrounds the two buildings. The chapel stands on the supposed site of the hut in which St. Cuthbert lived from the year 676 until 685. He then left the island and went a little farther north to Lindisfarne, or Holy Island, for a short period; but yearning for solitude he again returned, and died on Farne or House Island on the 20th of March, 687, in the small hut which had been built with his own hands. His body was removed to Lindisfarne, and remained there until 875, when the monks, fleeing from the fury of the Danes, carried the coffin on their shoulders. After many wanderings it found a

resting-place at Chester-le-Street in 883. From here it was removed to Ripon, and in the year 995 it was taken to Durham, where it remained until the Reformation. This small chapel on Farne Island is only one out of many dedicated to the great English saint. Many other churches bearing his name are found in the wide tract of country between the Trent and Mersey on the south, and the Forth and Clyde on the north.

Only one service a year is held in this church—indeed, I heard that three years had elapsed since this important event last took place. The interior is filled with old oak carving, which, it seems, was placed in the chapel some years after it was built. There are a few scattered gravestones and traces of monastic buildings round and about the church and tower. Several antiquities have been found, including a stone coffin said to have once held the remains of St. Cuthbert. One of these stone coffins is to be seen in nearly every place which St. Cuthbert frequented, but I believe the original is still in Durham Cathedral.

There is one thing of great attraction to visitors in the chapel, and this is the tablet to the memory of Grace Darling. It was among this group of islands that the *Forfarshire* was wrecked in 1838, and we all know the story how Grace Darling and her father proceeded to the wreck in an open boat during the

storm, and by desperate efforts saved the lives of nine persons. We visited the very spot where this ship was wrecked, and in calm weather the currents and swell of the sea are not to be despised, and we were left to imagine what it would be during a storm. The more we became acquainted with this rough coast, the more we were convinced, that this was one of the bravest acts ever performed by any in the long roll of England's daughters who have risked their lives for the sake of saving the lives of others.

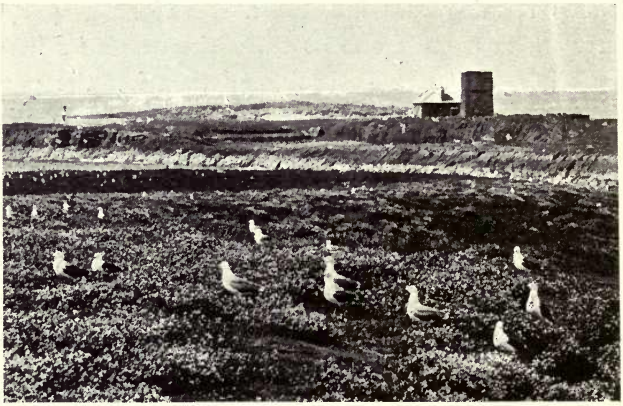
The surface of Farne Island, apart from the cliffs, is covered with grass, sea-campion, nettles, and many other wild flowers. There are few birds on this island. The cliffs have only a few pairs of starlings on them. Rock-pipits breed in fair numbers, concealing their nests among the long thin grass. One pair of skylarks bred there last spring, and the male bird was often heard singing high up over his romantic island home. Two meadow-pipits had a nest near St. Cuthbert's Tower, and one would often soar above the tower, then descend and finish his song from the top of the old walls. It was interesting to find that a pair of swallows had taken up their abode for the first time in a small shed near the tower, and when we were there, at the latter part of June, they had a nest, and there was every hope of their bringing up their family. We found a blackbird's nest, and saw young birds flying about

ROCK-PIPIT'S NEST

the rocks. Tree-pipits had a nest of young on the grassy slope which ascends from the only landing-place—these were always interesting. There are many rabbits on the island, and these would sometimes go near the tree-pipit's nest, and we had ocular proof of the pipits being plucky little birds. Once one of them flew at a rabbit, settled on its head while it was running, and inflicted a few vigorous pecks, after which it gave one or two drives with its little beak into the animal's back, and then left the poor bolting bunny more scared than hurt. All rabbits which came too near their nest were attacked, and it was pretty to see these bold birds—looking diminutive enough by the larger animals—scolding and fluttering at the rabbits.

The rabbits were of a very mixed breed; there were several colours—brown, black, white, a kind of pale blue or grey, sandy, and some other shades, some of which were very curious. One having black ears and nose, while the body was white, was evidently the belle of the colony, for she seemed to have more admiring followers than others. I must not forget to mention one other important animal—a donkey, which roamed over the island and seemed to consider himself monarch of his rocky home. This was no ordinary donkey—in fact, he was the most extraordinary member of his species I have ever seen. His chief delight was to drink beer and to

chew tobacco, and he was quite an adept in the latter undesirable practice. I often gave him a portion of mine, and his relish of the flavour left nothing to be desired, and he would, in sheer gratitude, follow me about all over the island. After a time, however, the weed began to tell upon him; he would become



LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULLS

lively, or too much excited. When in this state he would rush at one full speed, stop about two yards off, and then turn and kick violently in a way likely to cause consternation to timid souls who did not know his innocent ways. He would then go off, and soon return again at express speed; and once or twice I had serious reasons for thinking he was

"going" for me. A party of tourists visited the island one afternoon, and one of them, not knowing his ass-ship's tastes, held out about three ounces of "twist" for him to smell. Greatly to his discomfiture, and the donkey's delight, this was at once snatched away, and the happy creature trotted off to a quiet corner to enjoy the largest and most luxuriant "chew" he had ever indulged in. After a time he came back, and a lady tourist patted him and put her arm round his neck; but no sooner was he thus caressed than he resumed his exciting exercises, so the visitors, judging that discretion was the better part of valour, left the island. After their departure the donkey's antics would have delighted Lord George Sanger himself.

A few years ago there used to be a goat on the island, and a very amusing tale was told me about this knowing animal. Someone arranged to sleep in St. Cuthbert's Tower, and his friends jokingly told him that he would be sure to see the mediæval saint's ghost when darkness fell. However, he laughed at such a suggestion, and made out that he was not afraid. At dusk he took a walk round the island, and stayed out until it was dark. On his return to the tower he repeatedly heard a rustling noise near, and then thought he saw a shadowy form go past once or twice, and by the time he reached the door of the tower his nerves were to some extent upset.

Before he ascended the steep, narrow staircase, he listened to some little noise which sounded as if someone was moving about upstairs. He knew there was no other person there, and thus became still more frightened. At length the noise ceased, and he reached the room at the top of the first flight of stone steps, and again stood still and listened. The next minute he was upon his back, exceedingly terrified, but not much hurt. The goat had ascended the stairs before him, and as soon as he reached the room the creature, in supposed self-defence, "rammed" him in the stomach and knocked him down. His first impression was, naturally, that St. Cuthbert was bent on killing an unbidden intruder, but on rising to receive another attack he discovered who was the assailant, and drove the unfriendly animal downstairs.

In the little sandy bay which affords a landing-place there was a family of birds which were of never-failing interest. These were ringed plovers. Their eggs were laid on the sand just above high-water mark, and when we arrived their young were nearly full grown. I used to lie amongst the grass to watch these elegant birds, and having a pair of powerful binoculars I saw them as if they were within arm's length.

The two parent birds are together, "working" round large stones left uncovered by the receding

LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULLS

waves. Pieces of seaweed are moved by their beaks, insects are picked up rapidly, and even these tiny creatures, which the birds are looking after, can be seen as these quickly run about, until the bird's beak darts at them and they disappear. I begin to wonder how many more will be captured when a squeaky *pee-pee-pee* is heard, and one of the parents runs across the small sandy stretch, calling a musical *pu-li, pu-li,* and goes direct to one of the young, which is hiding behind a rock, and feeds it; then back he comes again, picking up insects as he goes towards the water. A lesser black-backed gull beats slowly up-shore, keeping close to the rocks; he has seen or heard the young plovers, and means capturing one if possible. As soon as he nears them one of the parent plovers flies at full speed at the great robber, strikes him while passing, then doubles in his flight, and before the gull is able to leave, another little beak-thrust is sent home. *Kar-raz* hoarsely cries the intruder, as he flies seawards, with the angry plover following, still striking above and again below, and then, when he is fairly driven away, the plover returns, sits on a prominent rock for a few minutes, gives out his musical whistle, and resumes the feeding of the young. Two of these latter are sitting on a rock, and at length another gull is seen to be approaching. This time both parents "go for" the would-be robber, and look like two white darts shot

from a bow; indeed, it is difficult to follow their flight, but they again drive the gull away, and then return to their young, which remained in hiding while their parents were chasing the enemies. This performance was repeated many times, and it was always interesting, chiefly because it proved what I have often noticed as a feature of daily life in bird-land—the larger the bird the greater coward he seems to be.

I think I have now mentioned all of the birds which were found on Farne Island during our visit. There was one species which was very conspicuous by their absence, these were our old friends the sparrows.

Not far from the larger island are two smaller ones, connected at low tide by a fairly wide barrier of shingle, and these, the Noxes and Wideopens, are, perhaps, the most remarkable and interesting to the ordinary visitor. Thousands of terns frequent the islands; the air seems to be alive with these graceful birds—the sea-swallows of the fisherfolk. With a good field-glass the birds from the mainland, two and a half miles away, look like flecks of silver spray as they sail in thousands over the sparkling sea around the islands. On our landing it is truly a wonderful sight, but it is not until we really get among the birds that we begin to realise what vast numbers of them there are. With a deafening chorus of cries,

ARCTIC TERNS' EGGS

flock after flock rises from the sea-campion and circles round and about; and then at our feet, eggs are everywhere, and it is difficult to avoid treading upon them. This is not so much the case among

the campion, but nearer the shore the eggs resemble in a remarkable way the pebbles and seaweed. There are three kinds of terns found here—the arctic, sandwich, and roseate. The last-named is rare, and can only be recognised by one who is acquainted with the species.

Although we kept a sharp look-out we did not see any of these. The arctic and sandwich to a certain extent keep separate. There are more of the arctic terns on the Wideopens, while on the Noxes we find a great many of the sandwich terns. In places the latter's eggs are laid so close together, that at a distance, sitting birds look like a white sheet. I was able to include as many as sixteen nests of these on one half-plate negative. I tried to obtain photographs of both birds sitting. On one morning I placed my camera near a group of arctic terns' eggs, and arranged the electric wires over one nest so that when the bird returned she would release the shutter. Three attempts were made, and on each occasion the bird returned, but instead of sitting at once she very carefully removed the fine wires. I thought that I set these so that if either was touched it would connect the circuit; but this knowing little bird managed to lift the wires on all three occasions without letting one touch the other. It was really remarkable how she did this. Being unable to obtain a picture in this way, I attached about

EGGS OF SANDWICH TERNS. 16 NESTS, 32 EGGS

forty yards of wire to the electric shutter, and took these down to the rocks, and waited there myself until a good number of birds were sitting, when I connected the wires, and so released the shutter. This should have ensured a good photograph; but luck was again against me. For some reason the camera had moved, and the birds, about twenty in all, were found to be blurred when the plate was developed. I think one or more of the terns must have settled on the heap of seaweed which covered the apparatus, and so moved the camera at the critical moment of exposure. With the sandwich terns I was a little more fortunate, but even in this case only one bird was found to show on the plate. In my hiding-place I could not see the birds, and so had to rely on a signal from a keeper, who was lying on a rock some eighty yards away. He must have been watching the wrong group, for when he signalled there were thirty or more sitting on the particular spot which he was looking at. While I was in hiding a ringed plover came and fed near, not two yards off, and I had a long and delightful view of this bird. We found a ringed plover's nest, with two eggs, in the midst of a group of sandwich terns' nests—indeed, the ringed plover seemed fairly common; this evidently was the second brood of this pair of birds.

Every step we take seems to rouse hundreds of

terns from their nests. Some, bolder than others, swoop near in their well-meant endeavours to drive us away. When really in the midst of this great

EGGS OF RINGED PLOVER

feathered colony it is difficult to hear the human voice, the thousands of bird-calls drown all other sounds. But as we walk back towards the shore the birds settle down to their respective nests, and only the males, or those not sitting on eggs, remain.

Many of the flying birds have small silvery fish in their beaks. Among the crowd it is hard to watch an individual bird as it goes to its nest, but by exercising patience I was able to see a sandwich tern feed a sitting mate. This bird flew over and round about the nest, seeming as though he was undecided which really was his mate. Then he would settle near the nest, and the hen rose and went towards him, when he seemed to be in a playful mood, for he flew away again, still retaining the fish, then twice more settled, until at last he gave the hen the food, and flew off in search of more. It was interesting to see them capture fish. Perhaps a dozen or more would be beating a certain stretch of water; then if a fish was seen the nearest bird would drop, and sometimes go almost completely under water. If, as sometimes happened, a shoal of fish came near the surface, hundreds of terns would congregate overhead, and for a short time sport was really exciting.

As we leave the Noxes an oyster-catcher is seen on the shore. His vermilion beak and pink legs and well-marked body stand out well against the dark, water-washed rocks, and form a striking contrast. There are several pairs on the Noxes, and also on the Wideopens. On the latter we found a nest among sea-campion, while on the former island the eggs were laid on the bare shingle, or on sea-

weed. When we land on the Wideopens it is a repetition of the scene on the Noxes, except that on this island there are a few puffins and lesser black-backed gulls. There was one greater black-

OYSTER-CATCHER'S NEST

backed gull. This bird had a broken wing, and not being able to fly it roamed about, and made sad havoc among the terns' eggs, which, with the young terns, were its only food. I think it successfully eluded the keepers the whole season. A

wounded bird such as this can do an enormous amount of harm. It is impossible to chase it if seen, for if anyone was to commence running or walking at random over the island they would break large quantities of eggs. When on Farne Island we often saw clouds of terns rise from different spots at different times on the Wideopens, and although we could not see the gull, owing to the tall campion, yet we judged that these alarms signified that the robber was making a raid. Eider ducks breed on both islands; the majority of these seemed to prefer nesting in the open, but a few nests were found amongst sea-campion.

OYSTER-CATCHER'S NEST

It was a grand birdland sight to watch these islands and their feathered inhabitants from our boat, as we lay a short distance from the shore. The birds which swarmed in the air in every direction when we were among them now are settling down, not more than a few hundreds are left, sailing in graceful curves over their nests, and although the combined chorus of their cries makes a considerable noise, yet it is as silence when compared with what it was. Oystercatchers are walk-

EIDER DUCK SITTING

ing along the shore, and probing with their beaks in the shallow pools. Two eider ducks, disturbed off their nests by our passing, are seen walking—or we might call it crawling—back to their eggs. Eider

NEST OF EIDER DUCK

ducks sit very closely; but I found that if we went too near they scrambled off their downy nests, and half ran, half fluttered away. The oft-repeated statement to the effect that anyone could stroke the backs of eider ducks as they sat, I found to be a

fable, as far as the Farne Island birds were concerned. Just before leaving their nest they squirt an evil-smelling liquid over the eggs, no doubt to prevent enemies from touching them. Lesser black-backed gulls, however, will take the eggs, whether covered with this liquid or not. It would, indeed, have to be a very terrible smell to keep one of these persistent robbers away. Numbers of arctic terns are now settling on their eggs just above high-water mark, and in places they form white rows. Ringed plovers are feeding near the water, running in and out among the larger pebbles. As we row away, the cries of the birds become fainter, and when again we land on Farne Island only the terns, sweeping gracefully over the two islands like white swallows, can be distinguished, while the islands—the higher covered with flowers, and the lower with seaweed—remain pictured in our memory as the finest home of the terns we have seen in the British Isles.

A sail of a little over half an hour brings us to the more distant islands. The shores of these are in places rugged and rocky, and as we proceed we have pointed out to us the spot were the *Forfarshire* ran aground.

We land on the island adjoining the well-known Pinnacles, and the first birds seen after scrambling up the sides are lesser black-backed gulls. These are here in hundreds, and the farther we go on to the

island the more of them we see. While I was photographing a little group of the gulls on the rocks, I saw one walking sedately towards me, and I pointed my camera at it; but before I could expose a plate this bird approached a nest belonging to a neighbour gull and pecked a great hole in the side of one of the eggs and swallowed the contents. All three eggs were quickly devoured, and then the thief walked away, looking quite satisfied and chuckling in a contented kind of way. The owners of the stolen eggs flew down, and as they swooped by uttered their harsh cries, but the thief

NEST OF LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL

rose and was soon lost among the crowd circling above. The lesser black-backed gull will guard its own eggs with great courage, but if an opportunity offers it will show no scruples in taking those in the nest nearest to its own. This island is covered on its higher ground with sea-campion, and among this most of the gulls have their nests; but many make their nests on the rocks.

If we trespass on their breeding quarters the sitting birds fly up in hundreds, when they form a striking contrast to the graceful terns. Still, their more heavy flight and less graceful movements are very attractive, and their great breadth of wing and the number flying around seem to hide the sky more effectively than the smaller sea-swallows. The nests built in the fissures of rocks are much more substantial than those made amongst the vegetation; in the latter place only a slight trodden-down space is used to lay the eggs in. I tried without much success to obtain photographs with my electrical apparatus of gulls sitting, but found that it was easier to secure pictures of them standing near their nests. The birds seem sufficiently inquisitive to prompt them to examine anything strange that is put up among their nests. We set our cameras and hid ourselves in the ruins of a small stone tower, and waited for more than an hour for some of the birds to return; but although several came up to our shelter and cautiously

HERRING-GULL'S NEST

peered in, none of them were bold enough to sit on their eggs. When near the nest they stand with necks stretched to their highest and keep perfectly motionless for five minutes at a time, then with a few

short, guttural notes take another step forward and stand as before. There were two eider duck's eggs near, which had been left exposed, and we had to watch these to see that the gulls did not steal them. Happily the duck soon returned, and her eggs were not disturbed, although more than one gull had cast longing eyes upon them.

We wanted to find a herring-gull's nest; but as the two species lay eggs which are so much alike that it is impossible to distinguish them, it was necessary to watch the groups of sitting birds to see if we could see the lighter back of the herring-gull.

One of the watchers, who live on these islands during the spring and summer, remarked that very few herring-gulls were breeding there during that season; but after most of the flying birds had settled we recognised one of this species lower down among the rocks. It was impossible to get a photograph, as she left before we were near enough. The nest of three eggs was quite surrounded with those of lesser black-backed gulls, and a nest of the latter species contained one abnormally large egg and one extremely small one. This was photographed; but in the picture the difference which in the original was so marked, does not show in the same degree. The crowds of gulls standing among the sea-campion made a pretty picture; but to see these birds to the best advantage they need to be on the black

rocks, the darker background shows them better, and their size is more apparent.

The chief attraction of this group of islands is undoubtedly the Pinnacles. One must see these

LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL'S NEST

fully to appreciate them. The four high rocks, with their table-like tops, packed tight with the masses of guillemots, is a sight never to be forgotten. Do the birds sit on their own eggs? is a question we ask ourselves, but it seems impossible that they

can do so, yet some authorities say they do. To look upon this vast feathered crowd, to take note how some birds settle on the backs of those around, and then slowly shuffle and squeeze themselves amongst their fellows, makes one wonder if it is really possible for each to know where their egg is! It seems to me incredible that they can know, wonderful as their instinct may be. If those sitting near the sides are suddenly alarmed, it is no uncommon thing to see several of the large eggs dashed over the rock-side, knocked down by the birds in their excited scramble to leave. The fisherfolk of these parts—and fishermen as a rule are very keen observers—say that each individual bird always lays an egg of the same colour, and the markings year after year are somewhat similar. They do not simply make the statement, in a way they apparently prove what they say. Thus if an egg is taken from a ledge where only a few birds are breeding, the next one laid where this was taken will as much resemble the first as it is possible for two guillemot's eggs to do. It is also affirmed that the same birds return to the same ledges in each succeeding spring.

Before the birds on these islands were protected as they now are, boat-loads of sportsmen, as they called themselves—devils with guns would be a more appropriate name—often visited the Pinnacles and

GUILLEMOTS ON THE PINNACLES

fired load after load of shot into the packed mass of birds, and left hundreds dead, and still more

GUILLEMOT'S EGG

wounded, either on the rock itself or floating on the water — left there to die after a miserable

existence of starvation. In the majority of cases the birds must have experienced terrible agony. Sometimes the programme was opened with a load of shot from a large gun which the steamer carried;

GUILLEMOTS AND KITTIWAKES

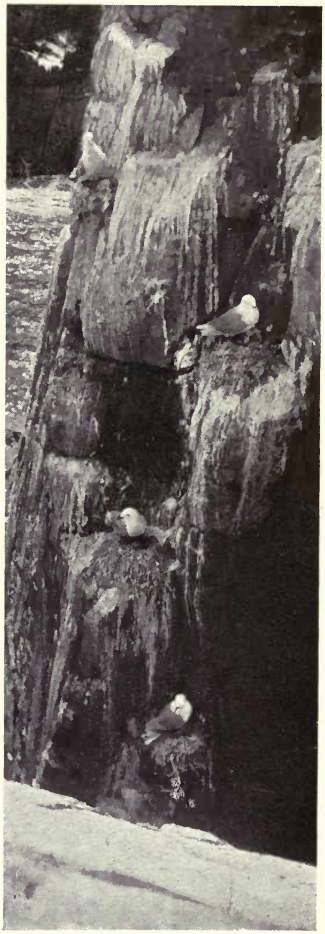
and with this, pathways were cut through the birds. After an hour or so of this slaughter, which these inhuman adventurers called sport, they steamed away, leaving behind such a picture of destruction, desolation, and agony as I hope the British Islands

will never see again. If these fellows have hearts, they should look upon the scene they leave behind. Here is a quotation from an article on the protection of birds, which appeared in the *Zoologist* for June, 1901. Mr. Oxley Grabham, the writer, says: "So-called sportsmen used to go out, on the opening day, with the avowed intention of firing away so many cartridges; they never even troubled to pick up one quarter of what they shot; and I have witnessed the pitiable sight of a wounded guillemot, with a broken wing, and its wounds exposed to the salt sea-water, trying to clamber up the cliff with a fish in its bill, to its starving young one, many of which perished through the death or maiming of its parents."

Of course none of this is allowed now during nesting time, but as soon as the close season is over this disgraceful shooting commences, and a tremendous amount of damage is done. There are numbers of young birds still on the rocks when the 1st of September arrives, and the parents keeping with them are shot down in hundreds.

One of the watchers—Robert Darling, nephew of Grace Darling—once stood on an adjoining rock and remonstrated with the men. Their answer was to turn the large gun on to him and threaten to fire a load if he did not clear off. This was in the nesting season before the islands were protected.

GUILLEMOTS



KITTIWAKES

Surely a stop could be put to this kind of devilry, which is still practised as soon as September 1st arrives. If the islands could be protected for another month, it would give a chance to the birds to leave, for then the young would be able to look after themselves. As it is, all the islands are visited, and hundreds of terns and the beautiful kittiwakes are shot for the purpose of adorning ladies' hats. More often than not the wounded birds are captured; their wings are then cut off, and the bird, still alive, is thrown into the sea! If ladies could only see some of this terrible work, which is only done to

supply their unworthy fancies, I do not think they would be so partial to hats adorned with such "murderous millinery."

On the lower ledges of the Pinnacles, kittiwakes are seen sitting; in point of fact, wherever a suitable piece of rock juts out, a bird of some kind seems to take possession of it. We can get quite close to the kittiwakes on the larger island, and as we slowly climb towards them their shrill cry, *kitt-i-wake*, is often uttered, the sound to me seeming to more resemble *give-it-air, give-it-air*. It was quite comical when photographing them to hear these word-like sounds so often given

KITTIWAKES

out; for sometimes we could almost believe that a human voice was speaking. Some sit exceptionally close; others are off and away directly they see us. I was able to secure some good pictures of these birds.

The rocks on the south side of this island are tenanted by long rows of puffins. As we get near to them these look exceptionally comical as they bob up and down before flying away. It is difficult to approach near enough to photograph them successfully; but by slow and careful movements we succeeded in obtaining some pictures. The best part of the island—or at least that part covered with grass or sea-campion—is undermined by burrows; and here it is that the puffin lays its single egg. We were fortunate enough to find one burrow, with the egg close to the entrance, and this was photographed. While walking over these burrows one often hears a scuffle below, and then sees one of the birds dash out and fly seawards. One can get an idea of the number here by looking on the sea. The water round about is dotted all over with puffins, or sea-parrots as they are often called, while there must be thousands flying around and sitting in rows on the rocks. The curious waddling gait of the sea-parrot is extremely funny when a number are walking together.

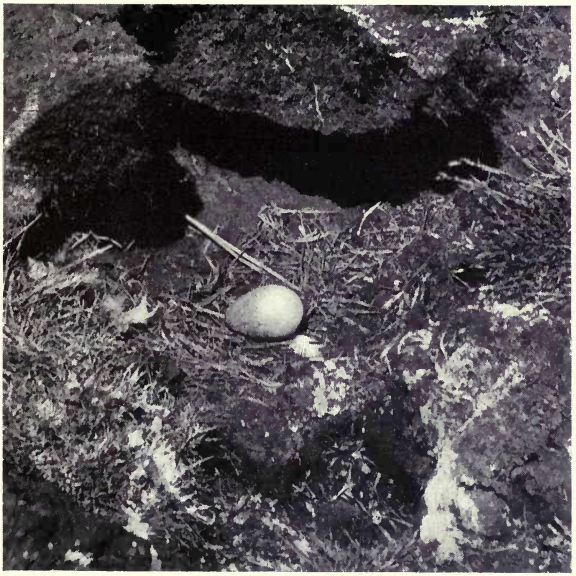
Incubation lasts one month, and the fledgelings —funny little creatures covered with black down—

KITTIWAKES

remain in their underground home for at least three weeks. Herring-fry is their chief food, and the parents may be seen with four or five of these in their beaks, flying with great regularity towards their burrows. The bright, horny sheath which covers the birds' bills is shed in the winter months, and the beak is then considerably smaller. Puffins are expert divers, and will remain under water for a long time. They fly enormous distances in search of food—as much as fifty miles sometimes. I have often met with numbers of them in the North Sea in the breeding season quite forty miles from the nearest land.

The birds which were of great interest to me on the Farne Islands were the cormorants. There are two colonies, the best-known being that on the Harcars, the other is on the most distant of the islands—the Megstone Rock. We visited both, and photographed the birds and nests. Those on the Harcars are the best for the photographer, for they allow a nearer approach. On the days we visited both colonies the birds were not in their most amiable mood, and would not let us get too close. However, by gradually working closer and exposing plates at each stopping stage, we were able to secure some satisfactory pictures. When all the birds had left, we went among the nests and photographed these, some being nearly a yard high and might be called pinnacles of seaweed, others are only about

six inches high. A few of the nests contained young birds, and ugly, black-skinned creatures they are, and during the first fortnight of their existence they



PUFFIN'S EGG AT ENTRANCE TO BURROW

remain blind. They were in this stage when we saw them. As we walked among them they tried to stand up in the nests, craned their necks up, opened their beaks, and swayed from side to side. I had heard so much about the stench that surrounds

cormorants' nests that I was a little surprised to find very little unpleasantness as I walked about among them. I found out the reason afterwards, however; a strong wind was blowing off the rocks and carried the evil smell away.

The day we chose for going to the Megstone Rock had an atmosphere perfect enough for giving an idea of the disagreeable effluvia which comes from the nests. It was hot, cloudless, and hardly a breath of wind was felt as we landed. Our boat was brought into a little creek and there anchored, while we with our cameras climbed up the black, slippery sides of the rock. As soon as we stepped on to the rock and commenced climbing, we obtained a slight whiff of the odours which awaited us above. This first breath alone would have turned some squeamish people back; but such a trifle as an evil smell would not turn enthusiastic photographers from their path, and so we went forward. Up flew the cormorants in a cloud, calling harshly, while the fainter cries of their young could be heard. Round and round the rock they flew in widening circles, making a deafening noise as they passed by. Now we are among the nests, and oh, that smell! I cannot describe it. One seems to be almost able to see the ill odours in the air. The stink is so thick you are reminded of what Londoners say of their world-famed fogs, "you could cut it with a knife." As we walk about or stop to

PUFFINS

focus a nest, each breath taken—and we naturally take as few as possible—has a choking sensation. I do not know if the inventors of fiction have outdone what we experienced in our morning's work; if not, this might give a new writer some inspiration. It is worse than anyone would expect to find in any

CORMORANTS' NESTS. FARNE ISLAND IN DISTANCE

of Nature's byways. The smell is overpowering, intolerable, sickening; there are no words in our extensive vocabulary to describe it. What is it that smells so horribly? Is it the rotting seaweed of which the nests are composed, covered as they are with droppings and portions of decaying fish? These partly account for the phenomenon, but one

of the chief causes I personally discovered to my cost. In crevices, fissures, and hollows round and about the nests, there is a dark green liquid covered with a kind of thin crust or dust, which very much resembles the surrounding rocks. This is, I think, the chief cause of the unpleasant odour. While

CORMORANTS

I was focussing a nest I inadvertently stepped into one of these horrible-smelling pools. I got out quicker than I went in, but found that the mishap had stirred up the liquid, thereby causing a stench to arise which far exceeded all former experiences. I did not at once attempt to clean my boot, but while continuing my work I saw to my horror that

the focussing cloth was floating on one of these evil-smelling pools. My feelings were far from pleasant, but I wrung the cloth out and went on with my work. During the twenty minutes we stayed among the nests and birds our experience was of a kind never to be forgotten. I left the rock, went back to the boat, and sat down feeling thoroughly sick.

You sail slowly away, and take long, deep draughts of the fresh sea air, but the smell of the cormorants seems to follow. Going home the wind rises, and you get in the bows of the boat and allow the freshening breeze to blow in your face, yet the stench does not seem quite to leave you. You reach the inn, enjoy a wash, and partake of a good supper; for notwithstanding the smell of the cormorants still in your memory, this cannot quite destroy the keen appetite which the bracing North Sea creates. You enjoy your repast, but still there is that thought ever present that all would taste better if the cormorants and their surroundings could be forgotten, but that cannot be. Then, after a walk along the shore, you turn in and hope for a good night's rest. You sleep as you expected; but in the night you dream that a cormorant is sitting by your bedside, and waking with a start the condition of the atmosphere lends reality to the dream. What can it be? Suddenly you remember—you forgot to put your boots outside the door. With a deep sigh and a thought of the

Megstone Rock, you turn, bury your head in the bed-covering and sleep again. It is not until the welcome morning sun shines in at the window that you again wake, then rising you will go the beach, bathe in the icy water, well wash your boots, and

CORMORANT'S NEST

then at last the smell that seemed to follow you has gone. But looking seawards you still see the Megstone — a black dot in the morning haze — and shudder, but still realise that another visit must be paid to these birds before you leave, because they are exceedingly interesting, yet you get even

reconciled to this, because nearly all good things have their drawbacks—especially cormorants.

These birds may be trained to catch fish, and since the time of the Stuarts this has been a favourite form of sport with some people in this country. In China large numbers are used for this purpose. The young, when fed, have been seen almost to climb into their parents' crops to take their supply of food. Any sudden excitement causes the sitting birds to eject fish which they may have recently swallowed. In the case of one bird I noticed it opened its enormous beak, then, with a kind of gulp, brought up a good-sized fish, which fell by the side of the nest.

The eggs, which are from two to five in number, have a pale blue ground colour, crusted over with a white chalky substance. When they have been sat on for some days they become stained a very dark brown, with dirt from the sitting bird, and then much resemble the colour of the nest. Cormorants will sometimes breed inland; they have been known to nest in company with herons in trees, while in Holland they choose the swampy meres, building their nests with grass, reeds, and other coarse water-plants.

On leaving the cormorants we went back to Farne Island, where we stayed for two days and nights, living among the birds. It was with never-tiring

CORMORANTS

interest that I sat on the rocks and looked out over the group of islands, each crowded with bird life. The early morning and evening seemed the most attractive times. On the nearer islands light-winged terns are very busy taking food to their sitting mates; some hover over the water, and when a fish is seen they drop and sometimes go under the surface. In calmer water, under shelter of rocks, eider ducks are swimming, each with quite a large family just hatched, the more handsome males leading the way, while other male eider ducks are swimming in farther off deeper water, and are difficult to distinguish from the patches of sea-spray. Lesser black-backed gulls are beating along shore, followed by smaller terns; but in the evening light all birds seem to be larger than they really are.

The tide is at its highest; on one side of our small island the waves are beating against the rocks, making a continual "washing" noise, quite unlike the continuous moaning on a longer stretch of coast. The sea on the opposite side is emerald-green, but not so bright as it was earlier in the day. Meadow-pipits are singing their sweet, trembling songs from St. Cuthbert's Tower, and two swallows circle round the old stone building. The lark is singing his last evening song; for the sun, now and again seen through the clouds, is nearing the water. The family of ringed plovers are busy in the small sandy bay

and pick up food left by each receding wave, sometimes sitting on the green and yellow moss-covered rocks. Rock-pipits, rising with darting flight, call their plaintive *weet-tuit-weet* as they fly over the patches of white campion; and meadow-pipits are

YOUNG CORMORANTS

also roused, these uttering a somewhat similar note. On the cliffs, where a few noisy starlings are going to roost, are small pools of water, left there by the last storm; for only in rough weather does the sea rise to this height.

Many flowers, including bird's-foot trefoil, thistle,

dock, and nettles, are discovered as we walk round and about the island, but the sun has now been below the horizon for some time, so that the light is not the best for flower-hunting. In the west the Megstone Rock, with its "whitewashed" summit, stands out with rare distinctness, while more to the

SUNSET OFF FARNE ISLAND

north and on the land, the Cheviots are wrapt in the haze of evening.

As it becomes darker, the wild cries of sea-birds are not so frequently heard; and then, one by one, they pass and go to their homes on the rocks. For a long time I look out over the islands, the more distant being lost in the darkness of night, the gleam of the Longstone-light showing the distance to which the islands stretch, while at regular intervals the glare

from the Farne-light is thrown far out over the spray-covered water, and now and again a white-winged sea-bird passes across the light and is lost again directly, and in this way the short night passes, the call or shrill cry of a bird being sometimes heard above the beating of the waves against the rock-bound shore. And long before the first beams of daylight appear, the solitary lark rises to open with his song of love, another day of busy life on these famous islands of the wild North Sea.

THE BASS ROCK

XI

The Bass Rock

IT was evening when I first landed on this celebrated rock in the Firth of Forth. Our small sailing boat, manned by two native veterans, left the little bay near "Tantallon's rocky shore" when the sun was nearing the western horizon. A fresh breeze was blowing from the coast, and as our little craft quickly approached the gigantic rock, its towering black sides seemed to rise higher and higher towards the clouds.

When we reached the rough landing-place it was at once evident that there would be some difficulty

in getting ashore, owing to the heavy swell which rose and fell around the steep and sombre sides of our haven. By good management and waiting for a favourable opportunity, however, we were able to jump from our rocking boat and to cling on to the water-washed rock. Then we climbed up the uninviting landing-place, made more uncertain as regards foothold by the broken condition of the rock, owing to a lighthouse which was being constructed. When above this we progressed up a pathway in places so steep, that it was more difficult than climbing the face of the rock. The top was reached at length, however, and we took a survey and formed some necessary plans for our visit on the morrow. We stayed on the summit for about an hour, and in that short time climbed down to examine several of the nests, some of which had fresh eggs in them, while others were almost ready for hatching. The boat had to return earlier than we expected, but our hurried visit just gave us an idea of the best part to go to when we returned with our cameras.

The morning opened bright and gave prospect of being a perfect summer day. Once again we landed on the rock, and had a little difficulty in getting our apparatus safely on shore. Everybody has heard of this remarkable little island, while many have seen it, but few, except bird-lovers, scientists, or antiquaries have landed thereon. A brief description will help

readers to realise what kind of a place the island is, and I hope will also give them a desire to visit a site in the North Sea which has attractions for naturalists, as well as romantic historical associations.

The Bass Rock stands near the mouth of the Firth of Forth, about two miles distant from Canty Bay,

TANTALLON CASTLE AND BAY

which is the nearest land. It is composed mostly of volcanic greenstone, and it is about a mile in circumference, the height is a little over three hundred feet. The only landing-place is on the south side, the west, east, and north sides rise sheer out of the sea and are almost inaccessible except to expert climbers, and many places would defy even these.

From June in 1691 until April, 1694, sixteen men held the then little fort against all the forces which William III. and the heroes of the Revolution sent against them. This plucky little band might have held out for many years longer had not provisions run short. However, they surrendered on honourable terms, the cause of the Stuarts being already hopeless. This was the last fort to hold out for the Stuarts, and one can well realise, when looking on this formidable rock, what an impregnable place it would be to capture when held by a few resolute and well-provisioned men.

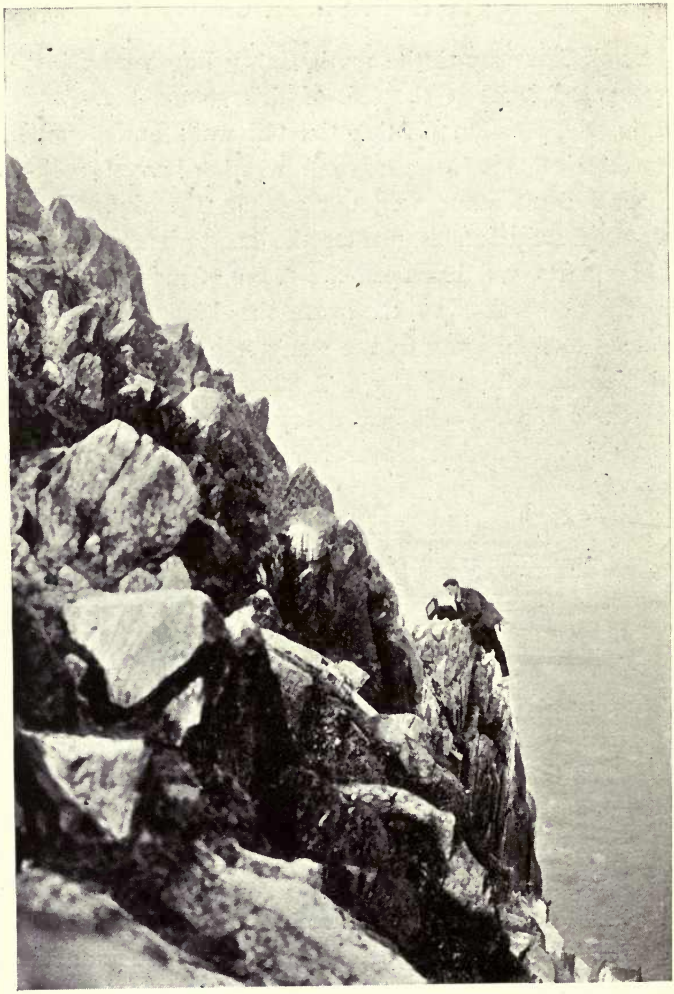
When I found myself on the summit the June sun rays came down on the grassy slope with a force which seemed to be scorching up the scant vegetation. Near I saw a little bird which I knew well, and one I should never have expected to see here. This was a hedge-sparrow; its song first attracted me, and then it was seen feeding while on the lichen-covered rocks. The little brown bird reminded me of the fields and gardens at home and seemed out of place in such a situation. Then a wagtail flew up and disappeared on the other side of the island, and before one was able to distinguish its species. Meadow-pipits were soaring and singing their trembling songs, and they would rise from their nests as I walked along. There were not many species of flowers; perhaps the most interesting, and which

attracted most attention, were a few fine specimens of tree mallow. These were fine healthy plants, and some reached a good height. Sea-campion was in the greatest abundance; there was also plenty of red campion, the flowers of the latter were remarkably large. Grass there was in moderation, but it was thin and looked half starved by the side of the more healthy-looking flowers. The view from the summit is one to be long remembered; all around, the sea is as blue as the brilliant Italian-

BASS ROCK—WEST SIDE

like sky. Away to the south, Canty Bay can be just discerned, and on the left of this stands the noble ruin of Tantallon Castle; the tall walls and turrets on the edge of the rugged weather-beaten rock-bound coast stand well out against the sky. The coast thereabouts is one of the most dangerous in these parts, and has been the scene of many terrible wrecks. Farther to the west the land is lost, or seems to fade away in the summer haze, and slowly blends in with the sky. A steamer entering the Firth of Forth looks like a toy ship, and the great streak of smoke it leaves behind hangs long over the still water and then gradually drifts away.

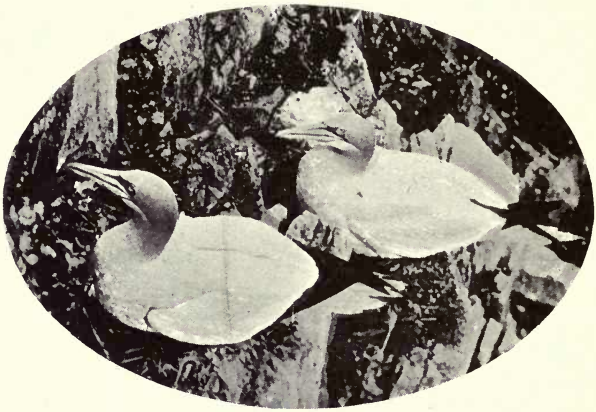
We now leave the summit, and go to the east side. Here, where the grassy slope meets the rock, we prepare our cameras, and get ready for the descent. Over the edge thousands of gannets are circling far, far below, looking no larger than pigeons from this towering height. Away on the sea, almost to the horizon, thousands more are swimming; then they are seen to our right and to our left, while above one of the great birds now and then swoops by with a rush, and skims onward, like a monster dart, to the bird-covered shelves of rock two hundred feet below. I climb down more to the north, while my friend descends on the east side. Sometimes these gannets are, as it were, quite sociable, and will allow one to approach; at other times if we go within thirty feet



AUTHOR DESCENDING THE BASS ROCK

they utter their shrill alarm note, *ki-u*, and fly away in a great hurry. It was so on the occasion of our visit. We tried to get close to one, and then another, but altogether failed. Then I "spotted" one round a ledge and commenced to stalk it. Stalking a bird on ordinary level ground taxes one's skill, but on this precipitous rock, where the slightest false step means a drop into the sea two hundred and fifty feet below, needs all the nerve and patience of the photographer. A steady head and sure foot are needful if one wishes to get the best results when photographing on such a cliff as this. However, by going down and then up again, and climbing slowly forward, I was able to expose two plates before the bird flew away. As there were no other birds near me, I returned to the top, and this time descended to where my friend was at work some eighty or more feet below. Here we found a convenient ledge about three feet long by two wide—quite a respectable standing-place after the narrow places we had just traversed. On this there was just room for one camera and the operator—that is, if one held on to the former to prevent it from toppling over into the sea. The cliff below bent inwards, so there was a clear view of the vast array of flying birds below, while we had a splendid sight of the whole of the east side of the rock. This view was one that will live in my memory for ever; it is one that is dear to the heart of any naturalist, and

anyone with any real sympathy for bird life could sit there for hours together, and all the time be filled with a sense of awe and admiration at the variety and vastness of the life and animation of this gigantic sea-cliff. Now there is suddenly heard an alarm among a group of birds two hundred feet or more



GANNETS

away, and at once a veritable cloud of them rise from the cliff, the sound of their wings as they first beat the air resembling a great muffled shout—*whooa!* Another and another party also leave their ledges, until the sea in an area of about three hundred feet square is almost hidden for the time. Round and round this great flock of excited birds circles, some

going one way and others another, while still more are crossing and recrossing in their flight to and from the cliff. The eye becomes bewildered by the maze of birds, and every other sound is deadened by their cries. *Quarr-quarr* some are calling, while the rest join in with the more shrill scream *ki-u, ki-u*. One flies near us, flops on to her nest, and then, through seeing us, is startled. The result is almost comical, for with a scream she leaves in a greater hurry than she settled, and in her excitement pushes her egg over the ledge. The egg drops, just strikes a jagged edge, and falls fifty feet more on its journey, and smashes with a red mess near another bird, which looks up inquiringly to see what is coming next. As no more eggs fall, she turns her head, and gives a significant *quarr*, which sounds much like an ironical cheer.

We remain still. Slowly the birds return, and several plates are exposed. I tried with more or less of success to obtain some pictures of the birds in flight. When photographing these it is easy to realise their swiftness of flight. The slightest hesitation in releasing the shutter means that the bird is far out of the range of the lens. Some which I took were found on development to be just on the extreme edge of the plate; but when I exposed these I thought they were on the other side. Those birds in the distance seem to be flying slowly, but

their size is deceiving, and especially is this so when they are near to the observer.

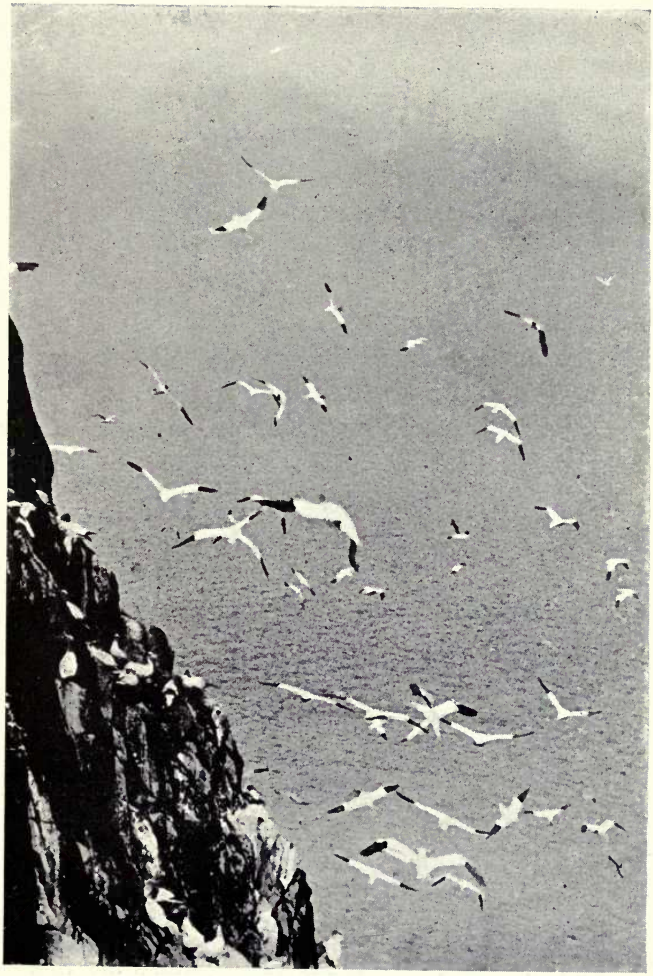
If we watch for some minutes we see many incidents which might escape the eye of a mere casual

GANNET SITTING

observer. Not far away below two birds are fighting. Their way of inflicting punishment on an enemy is extremely curious. One will seize hold of the other's beak, and the stronger twists and turns the neck of the weaker bird. Meanwhile their great wings are raised and moved slowly as they balance themselves, and then at length, by one supreme effort, the aggressor is twisted over the edge of the cliff, and with repeated cries of anger flies round, soon to become lost in the vast feathered crowd circling dreamingly all around. Some little way to the north there is now seen a great commotion. Two

GANNET'S EGG

strong birds are having a tussle; one has the advantage now, but the next minute the other regains her lost ground. It seems as though the hen attacked has committed an illegal offence by sitting in another's nest, and the rightful occupier is endeavouring to drive or pull her off. It is an exciting combat; the one on the nest holds on, although the other pulls and tugs at her beak. Who will win is the question. The birds around seem to be taking an interest in the battle; for they not only look on, but open their beaks to their very widest extent and send forth loud cries often repeated. Another gannet then flies towards them, misses his foothold, and circles round to regain the balance he has lost. Then he settles, and also gives out a loud, angry call; and then without more ado he marches up to the combatants and actually takes a firm grasp with his beak of the tail of the bird which is standing over the nest. The latter is now between two fires, and evidently hardly knows what to do. What can she do? Both back and front, or as a sailor would put it, stern and bows, are held fast by two determined foes. These are probably the feathered couple to which that particular nest containing its one egg belongs, which the stranger so gallantly tries to protect. Now she tries to escape, but finds this to be impossible. The real fun now commences. One bird pulls one way and one the other, so that



GANNETS

the poor creature *squeals* and *squars;* but this does not help her, and after a little more stretching she is pitched ignominiously over the cliff, and flies away, as one can only hope, a wiser and apparently a longer bird. Next time she sits on a nest I will be bound she takes care it is the right one.

It seems to me quite impossible to judge of the number of birds on this rock. Some say there are fifty thousand pairs, but I should think this to be too low an estimate; for in addition to the great flocks flying around, and the vast crowd sitting on the east side alone, there are enormous numbers swimming on the sea. These stretch away on all sides; in places the surface is white with them, and far away in the distance other groups to the unaided eye look like sparkles on the water as the sunbeams fall on them. Large steamers resembling small boats cut a pathway through the groups, when some birds dive and others fly from the water, and look no larger than swallows from our high coign of vantage. If we go to the top of the rock and look north, east, or west, we still see these white dots stretching far away seawards. After we have exposed all of our plates we find a suitable ledge, and sit and watch this busy scene, and endeavour to get it permanently photographed on our mind.

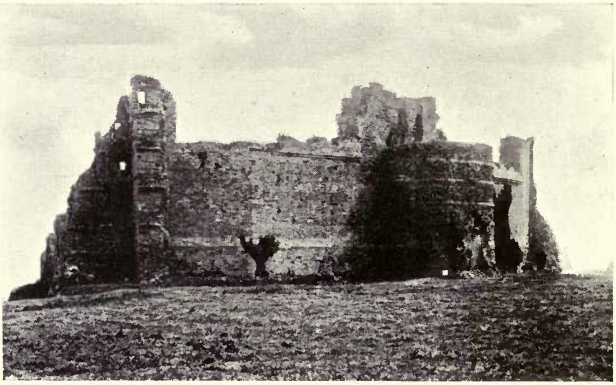
Immediately below, numbers of puffins are flying and swimming; some are darting rapidly from sea

to rock, and others leave the ledges and dash in straight lines to their distant feeding-grounds. The shrill cry of the kittiwake reaches us from far down the bird-covered sides, and the snowy-plumaged birds can be distinguished among the larger gannets. Guillemots also are here in plenty, and they are

GANNETS: A TALKATIVE QUARTETTE

seen sitting in rows on some of the rocky shelves; others are on the water resembling dark dots, and when these dive for fish they disappear one after the other, like bubbles extinguished by the sun's heat. A gannet flies up with a fish, places it by the side of his nest, goes away in search of more, and hundreds of others are doing the same. The beauty of the

summer sun lighting up this wild fairy scene, the calls from a thousand birds, deep, deep down; a pipit *piping* on the cliff, a tiny noise in the chorus; a peregrine sailing landwards, and the glory of the sparkling sea, and over all the screaming crescent-winged swifts now round the rock, and presently

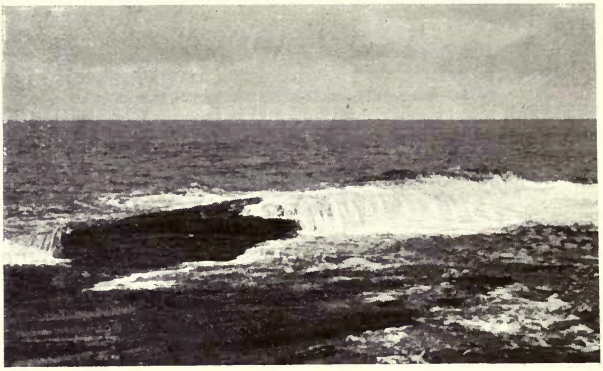


TANTALLON CASTLE: HAUNT OF THE SWIFT

darting towards their nests on Tantallon's crumbling walls, make a fascinating scene one is loath to leave.

But all too quickly the summer day passes, and a call from the heights above reminds us that our time has expired; and thus ascending to the top of the rock we see the white sail of our little boat gleaming in the rays of the setting sun; it is just leaving the

rocky shore of Canty Bay. We pack our cameras and prepare to descend, but our host Macbeth insists upon our partaking of such fare as he can offer, explaining that one has to be satisfied with what he can get on a rocky home like this. For one short hour we sit on the ramparts of an ancient fortification and look out upon the sea, now covered here and there with small patches of silver spray, meanwhile watching our boat approaching, and knowing that each wave it encounters means so much time less for us on this rock we fain would stay on. Then we are hailed again, and find that it is time to leave. We drink to the health of jolly Macbeth and his merry daughter and wish them success, and then go down to our boat. And as we sail towards Tantallon's stately ruins, and watch the Bass Rock seeming to grow smaller and smaller, it seems as though we had passed an uncommon experience in a land of dreams, and we look back upon our visit as one of the most remarkable and interesting days spent among the birds of the British Islands.



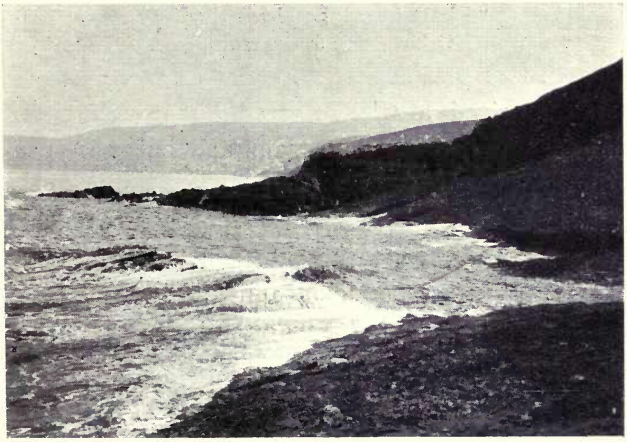
THE BERWICKSHIRE SHORE

XII

In Search of the Rock Dove

AFTER our short visit to the Bass Rock we had a few days to spare before our return home, and having heard of a cave in which rock doves bred, some little distance down the coast, we decided to make our way thither. From North Berwick we took train to a small fishing village on the Berwickshire shore; there we stayed for a day or two. It was a sleepy little place, quite unaccustomed to seeing strangers from the outside world, so that we, with our cameras, were a source of great attraction to the natives.

On the evening of the day on which we arrived the village fairly woke up. The next morning there was to be a wedding, and all the men folk flocked to the only inn the place boasted of to drink the bridegroom's health. For some hours, almost on to mid-



THE ROCK DOVE'S HAUNT

night, we had to listen to songs, bawled out with such power as only fishermen can put forth, the accompanist having a rusty concertina on which he played the airs, if he knew them, and if not, anything seemed to pass for "music" on this auspicious occasion. There was, however, one song which stood out from among the rest. It was one I have heard

sung in many places, but never have I heard it sung so well as that fisherman sang it. The musician who played the concertina had, I think, gone to get further refreshment, for he luckily did not accompany this song. With a fine tenor voice the fisherman struck up—

> "I have heard the Mavis singing
> His love-song to the morn," etc.

He received a well-deserved but rough encore, and sang the same song again, and one was struck with the fineness of his voice. At length the concert ended—broken up by the local policeman, much to the disgust of those present. The "gentleman in blue" was a new hand, and did not know the ways of the natives, and, to judge by the expressions which were hurled at him, I felt that he was in an uncomfortable situation while doing his duty.

We started along the rough, jagged coast to search for the rock doves' haunt, and after slow and difficult progress, over rocks which were as treacherous as any I have met with, we felt that the caves could not be much further on. A short distance ahead there were some winkle gatherers searching among the pools, and on inquiring how far a certain cave was, we were told that it was "twa miles and a bittock." Well, we went the "twa," but the "bittock" beat us. I do not know what a "bittock"

ENTRANCE TO ROCK DOVE'S CAVE

is in the Scottish language, but on this occasion it could not have been far off five miles. We did, however, see several rock doves, so felt sure they were breeding near at hand. Many other shore birds were seen or heard as we passed along the beach. As evening was coming on we decided to return along the top of the cliffs, hoping a road or pathway might be found there. We climbed up the rocks, and then came to a steep, grassy slope leading to the summit. This was dotted over with wild thyme, which scented the evening air. At the top was some waste land, covered with many gorse bushes. Flying over these were twittering linnets, their merry notes reminding us of the words of Robert Burns—

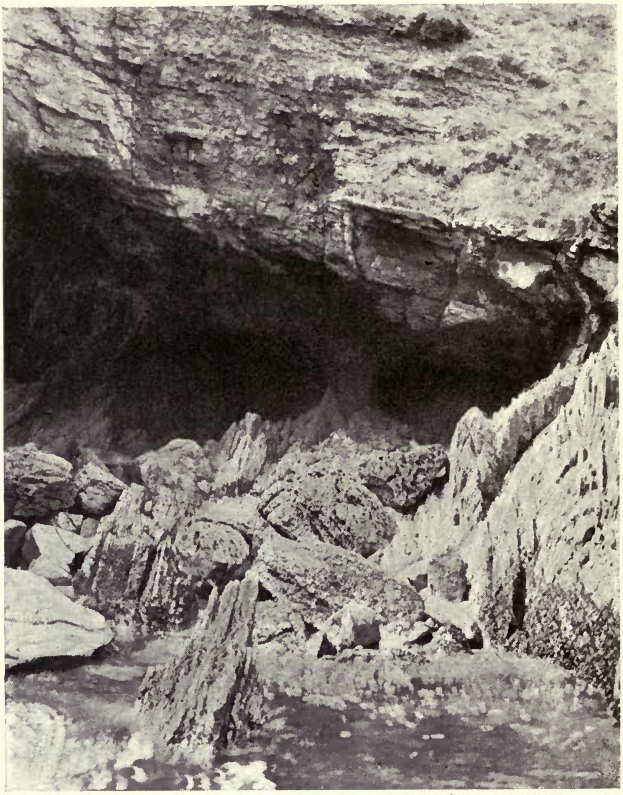
> "I wadna gie the l'ntie's sang
> Sae merry on the broomy lea,
> For a' the notes that ever rang
> From a' the harps of minstrelsie.
> Mair dear to me, where buss or breer
> Amang the pathless heather grows,
> The lintie's wild, sweet note to hear,
> As on the ev'nin' breeze it flows."

The next day we hired a boat to take us to the caves, and with us went our genial host from the little roadside inn. It seems to be a favourite form of amusement for sportsmen to visit these caves; while one goes inside and drives the rock doves

out, others station themselves on the rocks without, and shoot the doves as they leave. Good-sized bags are sometimes made in a day, but nearly every bird is either shot or scared away from the haunt. We feared that some of these fellows had been to the caves before our visit.

The caves were reached after a pleasant sail lasting about two hours, and we then realised the length of a Scotsman's "bittock." Although the sea was smooth, there was a remarkably heavy swell on, and even the fishermen thought landing would be impossible; but the boat was taken into a convenient little creek in the shelter of some taller rocks, and we jumped ashore. A short climb over sharp-pointed rocks brought us to the entrance of the cave, but no doves were seen. However, we entered and searched round, and found plenty of evidence that they had recently nested there; but the birds and their eggs were all gone, so that we had to content ourselves with taking photographs of the site. The roof of the cave was composed of red sandstone, and on this, numbers of house-martins had built. The whole rockside was dotted with their nests, all being made of red sand, and were thus difficult to distinguish from the cliff itself. These nests were interesting, as showing the house-martins' natural nesting site.

We were disappointed in not finding any doves



ROCK DOVE'S CAVE

nests, but the beauty of the bold headlands, rugged and sea-worn, the grandeur of the rough coast, and the wildness of the rock doves' home, well repaid us for our trouble. When sailing homewards the

Bass Rock—far away resembling a small puff of smoke on the ocean — could be seen, and many other sights and sounds, all suggestive of bird life, were passed by. The village was reached in the evening, and later on the same night we left Auld Scotia to journey south. But never shall we forget the kind hospitality of the friendly northerners, nor the charming birdland sights, and the beauty of the country, with its wild shores, all of which had lent enchantment to life day by day during our too brief visit.

XIII

The Protection of Birds

THE destruction of rare birds which we hear of from time to time, especially in the London suburbs, prompts one to ask, What can be done for the better protection of districts still picturesquely attractive? It is in the environs of London that birds most need protection. In out-of-the-way country parishes the more common kinds are not in danger; in point of fact there are thousands of square miles of country where birds breed unmolested year after year. In our London suburbs, however, and more especially on the north side of the metropolis, something more definite must be done in the way of protection than is being carried out at present, unless several rarer kinds of birds are to be annihilated. Mere notice-boards setting forth the provisions of the Wild Birds' Protection Act, placed in railway stations, in fields, or on fences adjoining the highways, seem very ineffective. I have seen bird-catchers at work almost underneath some of these notice-boards. The men are well aware

that very little notice will be taken of them by any local authorities. I once came upon two men with their nets set close to a pathway along which two policemen passed daily, and within a short distance of two prominent notice-boards containing lists of

PARTRIDGE SITTING

such birds as were protected in the districts; nevertheless, the bird-catchers, on this occasion, caught two kingfishers and numbers of other birds of various kinds. Near to London, kingfishers are very far from being common; but still, I know of a stream where Londoners may still enjoy the sight of these brilliant and interesting birds on any day throughout

the summer and autumn months. When the leaves have fallen, and the brook in question runs through a clearer course, bird-catchers come more often, place their nets across the water from bank to bank, and then, by taking a long, circuitous course, and return-

PARTRIDGE'S NEST

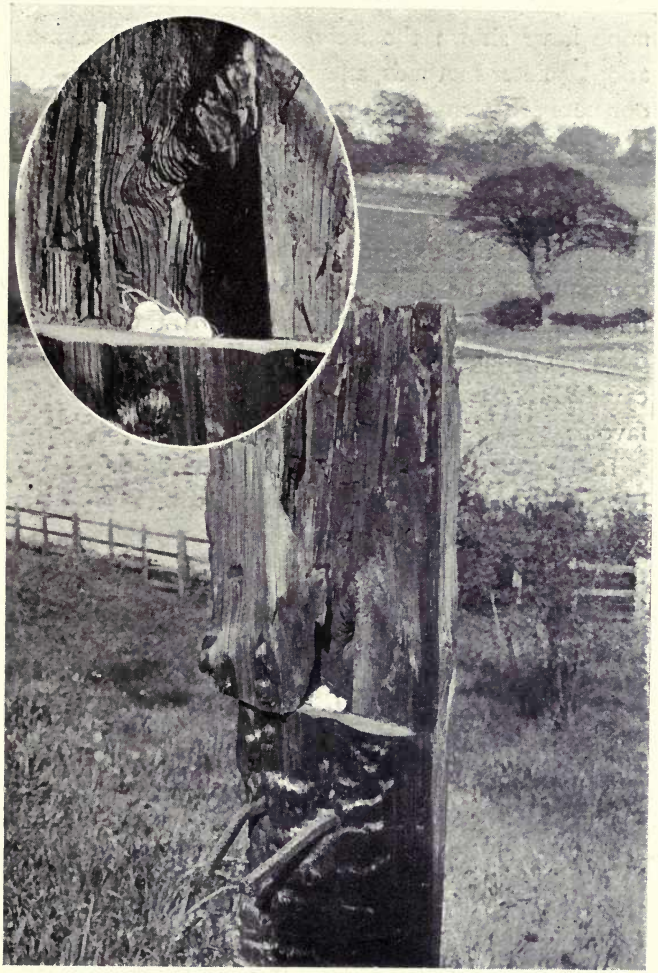
ing along the stream-side, meanwhile beating the bushes on the way, several may be caught within an hour. Kingfishers fly swiftly up or down stream close to the water, and through not seeing the fine net dash into it, and so become thoroughly entangled in the meshes. For ten years or more successively, a pair of kingfishers have taken up their quarters

on this brook during summer; but as regularly as the birds arrive they have been caught, immediately killed, and sold to the first customer who would take them at the price—one shilling and sixpence each! There is always a ready sale for birds of such fine plumage among publicans. In many public-houses of North London, cases of kingfishers can be seen, and the greater part have been caught on the suburban stream to which I have referred. All persons who buy birds which they know to have been caught in a protected district ought to be held responsible and heavily fined. They should certainly suffer punishment similar to that to which the bird-catcher would be liable if he was caught in the act. Such persistent extermination of a rare species is a disgrace to the county of Middlesex, while, at the same time, the countryside is being robbed of one of its principal charms. If a few of these men were taken, as could easily be done, and were made a severe example of, it would check, if it did not actually stop, bird-catching in the entire district. The news that a bird-catcher has been fined or imprisoned spreads amongst the fraternity very rapidly, the effect being correspondingly wholesome. I know from experience that that would be the surest and quickest way to protect our feathered songsters; but when these men are allowed to "work" fields and streams day after day, as they are doing in parts

of the metropolitan area, without check, we may soon altogether miss many birds which are a chief attraction of our lanes and woods.

SWANS AND CYGNETS

During the nesting season, when all birds should be protected, it is not an uncommon thing to see small gangs of men catching them by means of trap-cages. Dozens of singing birds, even including nightingales, are taken back to London when these men return from their day in the fields. The once conventional bird-catcher, with his large clap-net, who a few years ago was so often seen in the London suburbs, is now no more. The last man who set his clap-net in these parts was watched by the police and caught, and



WRYNECK'S NEST

none have shown themselves since. Now the men adopt quieter methods, and it is because neither traps nor nets are seen, that the police seem to think that bird-catching is a thing of the past. The large numbers of linnets, redpolls, and many other species which used to be caught in clap-nets, are now not captured to the extent they were formerly, and in consequence the difference in the numbers of wild birds is very apparent to those who ramble in the open air; but, nevertheless, such numbers are still caught, that something ought to be done in their favour.

In Epping Forest, which, I am glad to say, is fast becoming a birds' paradise, the rarer kinds are increasing since bird-catchers were forbidden to follow their murderous pastime on that favoured ground. The hawfinch, a rare bird at all times near London, is increasing, yet I know of a fact which ought to make even the Forest authorities more vigilant. Last year over a dozen—I believe twenty—nests of the hawfinch were robbed in Epping Forest. I also know that numbers of people visit the Forest on Saturday afternoons solely for the purpose of taking eggs, principally those of the following birds: Nightjar, nightingale, pheasant, redstart, wood wren, woodpeckers, and sparrow-hawk. Two species of woodpeckers are fairly common in Epping Forest, and it has been possible for collectors to cut open

the trees and get all the eggs without being noticed by the Forest Rangers. Are not these bird grievances which might be prevented by more stringent protective methods?

Notwithstanding any shortcomings, the London County Council have done much to protect birds in their districts; but certain ludicrous passages in their bill show that the protection of birds should be governed by a body of practical ornithologists. Thus I remember to have read, that the nightingale and many other choice birds, which love seclusion, are not allowed to be caught on Sundays in the neighbourhood of Saffron Hill, Hatton Garden, Ely Rents, and Ely Place! All birds are specially protected in London on Sundays, but what birds, except the ubiquitous sparrow, would one expect to find in St. Giles, Shoreditch, Southwark, or Hatton Garden? At the same time, parks and other open spaces, which come under the jurisdiction of the London County Council, afford shelter to numbers of different species of rare birds; and it is these that the Act is intended to protect. Indeed, birds are actually finding out all this for themselves in their own quiet and characteristic way, for in certain retreats of our London parks during spring and summer, one might almost fancy the spot to be a retired sylvan nook, alive with song and busy feathered workers, "far from the madding crowd."

LAPWING'S NEST

It seems easy to get the County Councils to issue bills for the protection of birds, but it is the greatest difficulty to get them to enforce their reasonable commands in a way which would be of service. In several places bird-catching goes on unchecked, very much the same as if there was no Wild Birds' Protection Act in existence. If bird-lovers would endeavour to get the offenders prosecuted they would be doing much towards efficient protection. In a district in Yorkshire several naturalists endeavoured to get their County Council to protect certain rare

birds without success. These gentlemen then took it upon themselves to protect the district, and subscribed money to pay for watchers in certain locali-

PHEASANT SITTING

ties. So successful was this effort, that after two seasons the County Council themselves undertook to provide the necessary watchers, the result being that birds, which a few years before were rare, now show an increase. This proves that it only requires

a little energy on the part of naturalists to make a County Council enforce the protection which the law prescribes, but which is not put in practice. It is not in keeping with the prestige of a great country that a society privately organised should be found putting in force the law which a public body is empowered to have carried out.

During the winter of 1900 and 1901 one bird-catcher in North London caught seventeen king-fishers; all these were captured in the district covered by the Metropolitan Police, and not more than eleven miles from the City. When it is possible for one man to kill such a number of rare and beautiful birds, surely it is time that something was done to prevent this wholesale destruction. If only it could be made illegal to retain captured birds and eggs of rare birds, which are protected, it would be the greatest thing ever done on behalf of the rarer species of these Islands. As the law stands at present, no one has anything to lose by shooting rare birds or taking their eggs. If prosecuted, the offenders are usually fined a small sum, about a tenth of the value of the specimens. If a burglar is captured with his spoil he is not allowed to keep it, yet a person can take eggs worth five pounds a clutch; if found out he is fined about twenty shillings, and he is allowed to keep the eggs! It pays such collectors' agents to rob our rarest nests, for they have no

risks to run.* I am eagerly looking forward to the time when the Wild Birds' Protection Act will be revised; at present it is almost useless, yet if left in the hands of a few competent ornithologists it could be made workable, and there would then be some hope for our rarer British birds.

* Since writing the above I am glad to find that the Royal Assent has been given to a short Act of Parliament which provides that, "Where any person is convicted of an offence against the Wild Birds' Protection Acts, 1880 to 1896, the Court may, in addition to any penalty that may therein be imposed, order any wild bird, or wild bird's egg, in respect of which the offence has been committed, to be forfeited and disposed of as the Court shall think fit."

XIV

Photographing Birds by Electricity

ELECTRICITY and photography have been used together successfully for many purposes. In one branch of photography, that of bird life, it is most useful. The patience of a Nature photographer is sorely tried at times; but now, with the electric release for instantaneous and time shutters, which I introduced over a year ago, there is no need for the operator to remain on the ground with his apparatus. Without such aid of electricity it would be almost impossible to photograph many kinds of birds, some being so uncertain and quick in their movements, that they are gone before it is possible to expose a plate while following the old method of using a length of pneumatic tubing or string. Before I obtained my pictures of the little grebe which appear in this volume, I tried to take them with a pneumatic attachment to the shutter; but the birds were so rapid in their actions that I found them not to show on the plates when I developed them—they had dived out of sight while

the air wave was travelling along the length of tubing. The pictures obtained show the success

LAPWING

of the electric shutter, which was exposed the instant that I wished, although I was many yards away.

The photograph of the lapwing in this chapter was taken by means of electricity, as were many others

in the pages of this book. I had great difficulty in photographing the lapwing; three days were occupied in securing a series of eight pictures. My camera was well concealed underneath a heap of rubbish, which was previously placed near the nest. I was in hiding behind a hedge over a hundred yards away, and watched the bird with my field-glasses. The wire connection being not quite long enough, I had a length of string attached, with which to connect the wires. If it had not been for this, I should have progressed well; but somehow, some cattle, which were grazing near, insisted upon entangling their feet in this, and thus exposing the plate. Bird photographers get used to little trivialities like this. Many plates were wasted, and a climax was reached on the third day. First a calf came along and got its feet caught in the string, and so exposed the plate. After another hour or so, several cows walked towards the camera and looked well at it; then one, seemingly more inquisitive, looked into the hole which was left for the lens to point through, put her tongue into this and licked the glass. When these were driven away a horse became entangled in the string and spoilt another plate. About noon six horses trotted gaily up to the camera and seemed to hold a short consultation, and then commenced business. One began eating the electrical apparatus, others chewed the covering of the camera, and one,

which I had not noticed, swallowed a length of string, and then, finding some discomfort, bolted, pulling everything over into confusion. I thus had a rather serious affair at one end of my connection, and what might be likened to a very large fish at the other. Bird photographers after all are only human, and I could not endure all this, so I packed up and left the horses and birds to themselves.

When I first introduced this electric release, many of our best-known bird photographers rather scoffed at the idea, yet now I notice that most, if not all, are using it successfully, either for night or day photography. In my book *Woodland, Field, and Shore*, I mentioned that a firm at Enfield were the makers. I did try to get one made there, but it did not at all meet with my requirements. Now, however, Messrs. Graham Brothers, of the same town, have made to my order a perfect release, which is quite separate from the shutter, and need not be fastened on to the camera. It works with a dry battery, and is altogether a great advance and improvement on that first introduced. Messrs. Graham Brothers are now making these, also another somewhat similar, which is fastened on to the shutter. For the benefit of photographers who are wanting a thoroughly reliable electric release I cannot do better than recommend this. The cost, with twenty-five yards of wire, is 25*s*. For those who have not much

time at their disposal an electric release is a necessity if they wish to procure pictures of birds. On many occasions I have left my camera out all day, and when visited in the evening have seldom found that the plate has not been exposed. There are many ways of connecting the wires with the nest or food which has been placed to attract the birds, so that the feathered visitors unconsciously take their own photograph. Perhaps the best way is not to have the wires near the birds, but to place a piece of very fine silk across the nest, if it is wished to photograph a sitting bird. This must be stretched across the nest and fastened to a firm support beyond. The other end is tied on to a small switch, which works so easily that a slight touch will connect the wires.

MOOR-HEN SITTING

Of course a silent shutter must be used, and the electric apparatus must make no noise, otherwise the bird will jump, and it needs an exceedingly rapid exposure to obtain a successful picture of a startled bird. One advantage of the release I use is, that it can all be concealed in a small box and buried under the ground if necessary, or even be hidden elsewhere; but if in the open it does not make enough noise to startle a bird. For taking photographs at night it is better to use a small accumulator, for then the current of electricity is strong enough to open the shutter and also fire the charge of magnesium powder. With my release the instant a bird or other animal touches the food, placed as a bait, the shutter opens and remains so for three seconds. A fraction of a second after the shutter is open the charge of powder is fired, and there is no fear of the plate being "fogged" by other light, for the lens is quickly covered again after the exposure. By using silk in the way mentioned, there is nothing to scare even the most timid animal. This is far better than having a small board or other visible thing, which must have the effect of scaring the wary prowlers of the night from their track.

There is something exceedingly interesting in thus getting our wild animals to photograph themselves, while the time saved by the Nature photographer is worth consideration. It is well to use a rapid

lens for such work. Mine is the Goerz Double Anastigmat working at F 4, undoubtedly the best lens for Nature and other photography, owing to its extreme rapidity and covering power. For photographing birds in the ordinary way, and where there is a good light, I have used the back combination of the Goerz Double Anastigmat, Series III., F 6·8. At full aperture splendid definition is given; many of the photographs I took on the Farne Islands were taken in this way. A fairly rapid exposure should be given when using electricity, as the bird often releases the shutter at the moment of alighting, and is therefore moving its wings. 1-200th of a second is quick enough for almost any bird, but sometimes, if the wires are carefully arranged, it is quite possible to give an exposure as slow as 1-15th of a second. The only silent shutter for rapid work

STARLING

which I know of is the "Anschutz" focal-plane. I use this excellent shutter for slow exposures also, owing to the silence of working. An interesting point I have noticed in connection with focal-plane shutters, is that when exposing with them one never gets halation on the negative. Many of the birds I photographed on the Farne Islands were against the sky, and behind them was the strongest light; yet not a trace of halation is visible on the plates. With the same exposure given with a shutter which works on the lens, the birds would be almost invisible owing to the halation, mostly caused by the reflection of light from the inside of the camera. This is, I think, one of the most important features in favour of focal-plane shutters.

The Cadett "Lightning" plates are the best for rapid exposures, and I advise pyro-soda developer, diluted with plenty of water for development. The Cadett "Lightning" plates are, however, so exceedingly fast, that care must be taken not to over-expose. On a bright summer day an exposure of 1-600th of a second can be given when using Cadett "Special Rapid" plates with a lens working at F 6. The advantage of using the "Lightning" plates, however, is that with a rapid lens it is possible to stop down to F 11 and still give an exposure quick enough for flying birds, and much better definition is secured. If the best possible negatives are re-

quired, I recommend all Nature photographers to use Cadett plates.

I hope shortly to place in the market a thoroughly practical bird camera, which will contain all the things necessary for taking successful bird pictures. This will be supplied by Messrs. Sanders and Crowhurst, of 71, Shaftesbury Avenue.

There is an ever-growing interest taken in bird photography, and I do not wonder that it should be so. Any enthusiastic naturalist, who once takes up this exceedingly fascinating branch of photography, does not readily give up the practice. Searching for and photographing the nests of our commoner birds is most interesting, yet when we come to tracking our rarer birds into some of the wildest parts of the British Islands, bird-nesting with a camera becomes an exciting sport, leaving behind pleasant memories not readily to be forgotten of days and hours spent in birdland.

PUFFINS